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introduction

[image]

Before I even welcome you to Crows, I'm going to answer the question you're probably wanting to ask "Dipperflight? Is this some kind of bad Gravity Falls / Warriors crossover??"

A dipper is a type of bird that lives over in England. It is very dark brown with a black band/stripe and a white throat.

Now that that's cleared up...

Welcome to Crows. I was inspired to write this when considering that I wanted to explore the topic of someone who's in an abusive relationship and how to go about getting out of, something you, my dearest readers, might have the very, very unfortunate chance of getting into.

I'm attempting to write the whole of Crows in the month of November. It's going to be a shorter story in general, so I'm deciding to do it for my very relaxed unofficial NaNoWriMo. My goal is to get it all done in November, but if I spill out into December I'm not too worried. I do still have schoolwork to do.

I swear this wasn't spur of the moment either. I've been planning this throughout the past month I even have art posted on my DeviantArt (it's toadstepping no regrets for personal advertising).

Also, yes, the main character is bisexual. Sorry if you aren't into that, I'm not forcing you to read this, if you do choose to leave and not continue, then goodbye. If you choose to stay, then I hope you enjoy Crows.

Now, on with the story.

one

[image]

"It's nearly sunhigh, I really need to get back to camp." Dipperflight meowed, his tail flicking restlessly. The brown tabby stood in a clearing, a freshly caught robin and a few mice at his paws. Fallen leaves coated the forest floor, and light birdsong and cricket chirps hummed at the air. A pale striped calico she-cat stalked back and forth at the edge of the small clearing, her eyes scanning the undersides of the bushes and ferns that crawled out from the surrounding wild. She flicked her tail for silence. Dipperflight sat neatly, wrapping his tail around his paws to try and keep them warm, though his whiskers still twitched with unease.

The calico gave up with a huff, turning and sulking back.

"I was hoping to find at least one more mouse...." She mumbled, scooping up the three mice by their tails.

"I think the robin I caught will help make up for it," Dipperflight rumbled, starting away with relief. *I need to get back to camp-- I'm almost late*. The calico stopped, raising her tail and setting down the mice as she dropped to a hunting crouch. Dipperflight's tried to keep as still as he could, anticipation churning at his paws. *We can't stop now..!*

The tabby calico stalked forward quietly, her ears swiveled forward and body so low to the ground she appeared to be sliding along like an adder. She pounced forward suddenly into a pile of leaf litter, reemerging proudly with a mouse in her mouth.

"See? I knew there had to be another mouse around here. No cat has hunted in this clearing in a few days, so I just knew there had to be at least one more."

"Yes, yes, can we go now? I really need to be back by now, if we don't hurry it'll be past sunhigh by the time we make it back, Dawnwhisker." The calico waved her tail in dismissal to the dark

tabby. She picked up the other mice, her amber eyes glancing to him.

"What, do you have some hot date?" She paused, a purr escaping her jaws. "Pfft, you probably do. You and Fennelstorm are so cute; he's always worrying about you." Dipperflight flicked a dark ear deftly, concentrating on the tantalizing scent of the prey they were bringing back. "I personally don't really want a mate, but I guess I can see how some cat might want one," she meowed, making conversation. Dipperflight barely heard her though, and she ended up giving up on talking.

The pair wove their way through the brambles, ferns, and trees. Finally, the gorse tunnel came into sight, and Dipperflight bounded the last few steps, pushing through the entrance.

As soon as the brown tabby set paw in camp, he was met by the green gaze a handsome golden ginger tabby. Fennelstorm. He stood under the High Rock, having stopped pacing.

"Dipperflight!" He called, his tail high and twitching. Dipperflight quickly padded to his mate, dropping the robin at the tom's paws.

"Sorry--" he began to mumble, but Fennelstorm cut him off.

"You're late. How inconsiderate of mate are you that you don't even come back to camp when I ask you to?" The dark tabby ducked his head lower, his ears flicking back. *I should've pushed Dawnwhisker to hunt faster. I should've run faster when we came back.*

"I know, the hunting just took a little longer than I thought it would--"

"Then you should've hunted faster," Fennelstorm looked down on the thicker-coated warrior. "You're lucky you have me, you know. Any other cat would've left you by now." Dipperflight nodded slowly. *I should've never gone out with Dawnwhisker.*

"I'm sorry, Fennelstorm," Dipperflight meowed. He felt his mate nose him, pulling his head up.

"Just don't do it again. Come on, bring that robin over here to eat."

Fennelstorm pulled away to lead to a patch of ferns. Dipperflight looked down at the bird.

"Actually, I think the robin was going to go to Lionfur and their kits," Dipperflight meowed sheepishly. Fennelstorm's eyes narrowed.

"I'm the *deputy* of ThunderClan. If I want to eat, I will eat." He hissed. Dipperflight nodded quickly, picking up the robin and taking his place at the patch of ferns. Fennelstorm lay down next to him, beginning to pluck the robin's feathers in order to eat it.

He glanced to Dipperflight, who was staring at his paws. *I shouldn't have said anything. Now Fennelstorm is mad at me.* He looked over to his mate, who was slowly eating the robin, his eyes moving across the camp to watch the other cats. *He should be. I shouldn't have doubted him.*

"Hey, Dipperflight." Fennelstorm murmured. He pricked his ears, sitting up slightly.

"Yeah?"

Fennelstorm nosed the half-eaten robin over.

"I'm done, you can have the rest." He began cleaning his fur. Dipperflight tucked into the meal, watching his mate. *He's so kind and forgiving. He's right too, I really don't deserve him.*

He closed his amber eyes. *I'm lucky to have him.*

two

[image]

Dipperflight crouched outside the warrior's den, watching the patrols be assigned. Fennelstorm stood beneath the high ledge, warriors gathered around him with sleepiness still warming them. Dipperflight stood, edging closer. Maybe the deputy would assign him to a hunting patrol? *Though, with me messing up and not doing what he wanted yesterday, that's doubtful.*

He caught the glance of Dawnwhisker as she half-listened, half-slept to Fennelstorm's sharp commands.

"Dawnwhisker." Her eyelids fluttered as she was called, her ears twitching.

"mH-- yes?" She sat up straighter, attempting to blink the sleep from her eyes again.

"You'll be leading a hunting patrol at sunhigh at Sunningrocks. Take...," Dipperflight locked eyes with him. "Anyone you think will be up to it." A quick jolt of happiness sparked in the tabby tom. Dawnwhisker would probably choose him; she always liked chatting with him. The tabby calico looked right at him, opening her mouth to speak. "Except," Fennelstorm spoke up, continuing, "Dipperflight. I have a certain task for him." Dawnwhisker nodded, flicking her ear to the deputy's mate.

Dipperflight curled his tailtip with interest. What did Fennelstorm have planned? An outing to somewhere nice? A run through the treetops? Helping with the apprentice's duties? His amber eyes were bright with anticipation, but the ginger deputy didn't so much as hint to what his job was going to be. Fennelstorm finally turned after the patrols had been assigned, and Dipperflight saw Dawnwhisker return to the warriors den to catch a bit more of sleep.

"So!" Dipperflight blinked, his tail high. "What do I get to do

today?" Fennelstorm narrowed his eyes with confusion.

"What do you mean 'what do I get to do today?' You're staying in camp." Dipperflight's excitement deflated quicker than a WindClan cat chasing a rabbit.

"I just thought--" Dipperflight ducked his head quickly as he caught Fennelstorm's glare.

"I'm going out on patrol all throughout the day, and I don't want to catch even a trace of your scent outside of camp," he paused before turning to leave, "Hopefully you can at least do this." Dipperflight slowly nodded. *Yeah. Yeah, then he won't be mad at me. He'll be happy with me.*

He turned, padding back to the warriors den to try and fall asleep again, but as he curled up tightly in his moss nest a tail length in front of Fennelstorm's empty one, he couldn't help but feel something tug at his heart. He pulled his tailtip over his nose, ignoring it, forcing his breathing to slow and sleep to overcome him.

Dipperflight was outside the warriors den again, the sun nearing high. He hadn't slept for very long, the sunrise patrols leaving and returning dawn patrols had stirred him right when forgotten dreams had started chasing through his head.

Cold sunlight burst through clouds, gently trying to warm the ThunderClan camp. Dipperflight carefully watched Rosefoot and Lionfur groom each other's pelts, their two kits running around them. Rosefoot carefully stroked his mate's golden ginger coat, while Lionfur purred quietly to themself. Cypresskit was loud as usual, bossing around her sister Plumkit ruthlessly. Lionfur flicked their tabby tail sharply at Cypresskit, making her let out a surprised yelp.

Dipperflight blinking slowly. He couldn't remember the last time he and Fennelstorm groomed each other. It had to have been back when they first started being interested in each other. It was soon after his father, Ravenfur, had died. He looked down to his paws,

shaking the memory away.

He looked up to Rosefoot and Lionfur again. Cypresskit and Plumkit had resorted to play fighting, which Plumkit did seem to excel much more at, causing the darker ginger kit to get frustrated and make up rules limiting the smaller sister. Dipperflight's eyes softened. Maybe if.. One day... He shook his head. No. *Fennelstorm is way to busy with being deputy and keeping cats under control, and besides I'd probably mess something up.*

He spotted Dawnwhisker exiting the warrior den, stretching. Her calico pelt was still ruffled in a few places, but she didn't seem to mind. She waved her tail lightly to Dipperflight as she crossed the clearing to Lionfur and Rosefoot. The ginger tom stood up as she approached, and Lionfur looked at the kits before saying something that he couldn't make out. Dawnwhisker looked across the camp to Dipperflight, motioning for him to come.

The brown tabby got to his paws, curiosity driving him towards the nursery entrance.

"Hey, Dipperflight, Lionfur wanted to come with us on the hunting patrol to get some fresh air, ya'know?" Rosefoot began.

"I just wanted to know if you could possibly watch Cypresskit and Plumkit while I'm out? I won't be long, and you'll only have to sit and look out for them--"

"Yeah..!" Dipperflight meowed, and he wondered if it were a bit too quick of a reply. *I bet this is why Fennelstorm wanted me in camp--he knew this would be happening, and he wanted me to help out!* Lionfur's face lit up.

"Thank you so much!" They purred, tail high. Dawnwhisker had already departed to round up two more cats for the patrol, and was standing at the bramble camp entrance.

He watched the hunting patrol leave, Cypresskit and Plumkit just behind him to watch their parents depart with wide, excited eyes.

"This is so exciting!" Plumkit chirped, leaping out to jump onto

Dipperflight's tail. Dipperflight purred, swishing his tail back and forth for her to chase. Cypresskit pushed her sister over, though, leaping down to catch his dark tipped tail, which flicked out of her white pawed reach just before she could claw him.

"We could play moss ball!" Plumkit chimed in from where she had been pushed over. Cypresskit stopped her chasing to brightly nod.

"Yeah, yeah! Dipperflight, you should play moss ball with us! You're a huge warrior, but you'll probably miss all of our awesome tosses!" The dark ginger kit purred.

"I'll go grab some moss from my nest!" Plumkit darted off before Dipperflight could tell her not to use her own bedding for games.

The sun was half-way down the sky before the hunting patrol returned. Cypresskit was chewing on a springy root, Plumkit half-asleep against Dipperflight's hind-leg. Cypresskit sat up, sprinting to meet her parents as they entered the camp, each carrying a bird. Dipperflight sat up quickly, noticing Fennelstorm returning with the patrol as well. Plumkit had woken all the way up by then, trotting to greet Lionfur with a happy purr. Fennelstorm strode up, having just dropped a vole on the fresh kill pile.

"Dipperflight," the ginger tom said his name, though whether it was a greeting or a call, the ThunderClan warrior wasn't sure.

"What patrols did you go on today?" Dipperflight asked, keeping his head low and gaze up to the deputy.

"What did *you* do?" He completely ignored the question. Dipperflight sat down, his eyes closing proudly.

"I stayed in camp, *and* I watched Lionfur's kits! They were really good the whole time, I was a little worried--"

"What? *Why?* You were supposed to be taking a day off-- no work at all. Why would you watch their kits? You should've been in the den resting." His quiet, sharp mrow drew Dipperflight back to reality. He blinked slowly, letting out a small exhale of realization. *How*

could I have been so blind? My life isn't like Lionfur and Rosefoot's. Life isn't kits and cuddles. He looked to the ground shamefully.

"I'm sorry Fennelstorm...," he murmured quietly.

"I would hope you're sorry. *StarClan*, Dipperflight." He gently nudged his mate's cheek, pushing him in the direction of the patch of ferns. "You've *always* got bees in your brain. Hopefully tomorrow you'll do better. Honestly, you've been horrible the past few moons." Dipperflight nodded slowly, catching the glance of Stonevine who padded past the pair. The grey tabby she-cat purred a small "hey," and, "you two are so cute." Fennelstorm purred brightly to her, curling his tail. Dipperflight's fur grew hot.

I guess. Everyone says we're adorable and good but... Lately, I don't know. Something doesn't really feel all too right. Maybe it's nothing, but maybe.. Maybe. No. I can't think like that. Fennelstorm saved me, he loves me. I owe it to him to try to be a good mate, to try and not be such a terrible cat all around. He settled down in the ferns, a mouse-length from the ginger tabby. *I need to keep trying to be good enough and make him happy.*

three

[image] [image]

art by the lovely sleepykittystudios
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Sunlight stretched down from the sky without any clouds obstructing it, it's gentle golden rays just barely providing any warmth to the forest below it. Dipperflight padded alongside a border patrol consisting of Stonevine, Sorrelleap, Eveningpelt, their apprentice Dandelionpaw, and himself.

Dandelionpaw chirped loudly, talking about how she once had to fight a hawk to catch a mouse, her long-haired tail waving with excitement. Her dilute calico mentor half-listened, her eyes focused ahead, while the dark ginger Sorrelleap was completely invested in the story. Stonevine led the patrol, her gray tabby tail high. Dipperflight took it all in with interest.

Going on patrol was one of his favorite things, especially the ones out to the RiverClan border. It was nice to clear his mind outside of camp, the fresh air and the dull, yet full, scent of water carried on the wind and through his pelt. While the RiverClan border was fairly dangerous with Sunningrocks a constant battleground, and their sharp glares weren't usually very pleasant, he couldn't help but feel content. He was keeping his clan safe, while at the same time he was doing as Fennelstorm had asked.

"Stay near the back of the patrol, and keep your eyes open. If anything bad happens, you run back to camp. I'll be getting a full report from Stonevine when you get back," Fennelstorm had meowed with head high.

"Dandelionpaw, don't run too far ahead." A wind rustled the leaves and grass, and sound of sloshing water alerted the patrol that they had arrived at the border. The trees just barely thinned out, stopping almost suddenly several fox-lengths from the edge of Sunningrocks.

"The rocks are barely warm...," Dandelionpaw complained. The patrol was more upstream from the large stones, but the white apprentice had found a stray rock to leap onto.

"That's because it's Leaffall. Now, get down from there and mark the border like a proper warrior." Eveningpelt lectured her apprentice, who reluctantly tramped back to her gray, cream, and white mottled mentor. They moved further up the border, Stonevine stopping to check the scent and remark a clump of grass next to the riverside. Dipperflight stood near the back, his eyes watching the other side of the river as the others spread along to refresh the marks. He carefully observed Dandelionpaw, who was playing at the rushing water's edge.

Just as he was about to warn her to step away from the edge, his heart dropped as he watched Sorrelleap unknowingly back up right into the apprentice. The white cat let out a shriek as she splashed into the river, sweeping the scrawny apprentice down under. Dipperflight didn't even wait to catch a patrol member's eye.

He didn't even think about Fennelstorm.

Instead, he leaped right into the river after her, an icy blast immediately biting at him. His pelt felt weighed down, and as he forced his eyes open, he could see Dandelionpaw much further downriver, the water having a good hold on her long, thick fur.

He bobbed to the surface of the choppy waters momentarily before a current pulled him right back under. He could hear Stonevine, Sorrelleap, and Eveningpelt yowling something, but the water muffled everything in his ears and dulled every sound.

He glanced another flash of white and struck his paws out to try and swim closer to the apprentice, the river sucking him deep into the depths. He tried grabbing her, water stinging his barely-open eyes and pain screaming at his muscles as he forced himself to keep moving. One more stride. One more stroke. The water was freezing, gnawing at his entire body, numbing his body.

Finally, though, he was able to grab Dandelionpaw's scruff. He tried struggling to the surface, but it seemed so far away. Sunlight

beamed through, glowing off sides of rocks that jutted out along the further sides of the river as well as coating the bed. His lungs burned. His body was mostly numb, cold still penetrating to his skin and sinking in. Dandelionpaw's eyes were shut, a bit of blood flowing out from a hit to her head, loosely streaming though the water.

He shut his eyes tightly for a moment. *I don't have a moment to think though.* He struck his paws out again, but the combined weight of Dandelionpaw plus his own wet fur was *so* much, and *StarClan I can't even swim I can't breathe I'm going to die. Will Fennelstorm be okay..? He seems like he would be okay... All I ever do is disappoint him.* All strength seemed to seep out of his body in that moment.

He heard the sound of something dunking into the water-- perhaps it was Eveningpelt finding a much smarter way to retrieve the apprentice. Perhaps it was a duck. Perhaps it was Fennelstorm himself coming to yank him out of the river and tell him how rash and idiotic he was. He forced himself to open his eyes as he felt the weight of Dandelionpaw be lifted out of his mouth. Two cats, one a long-bodied brown tabby, the other small and black furred, swam away with the long-haired white apprentice in tow.

Swimming toward him was a mostly solid pale gray cat. Their fur was slightly long, the water waving it gently in its grasp, the sunlight glowing and outlining his slim frame. The cat's eyes were open, a focused dark amber-brown. Their paws, which were small and creamy, were outstretched as they swam closer with powerful strokes.

Dandelionpaw and her saviors broke the surface right when the gray cat reached Dipperflight, grabbing his scruff and pulling him up. The water growled as it streamed past, not happy that it was losing its prey. Dipperflight barely realized what was happening as he was brought out of the water, the bitterness of the day rushing to great his soaking, cold, wet pelt. He vaguely saw Stonevine grab his scruff, pulling him up the shore as the grey cat stumbled after them. He coughed heavily, unable to properly breathe, and the gray cat entered his vision again.

"May I?" He thought he could hear their voice-- soft and gentle.

Stonevine nodded quickly, her green eyes round and unreadable. Suddenly, the gray cat's small paw was on his chest, and it pushed down heavily with a deceptive strength. A rush of water poured out into his mouth from his lungs, and he half-sat up, the liquid surging out of his mouth.

Everything was much more clear then. The cats, RiverClan cats he assumed, were standing over Dandelionpaw. One had their ear pressed to her chest, and the gray tom who had rescued him had moved over to aid them. Eveningpelt seemed in shock as she stood helpless behind the three cats, and Sorrelleap was nowhere to be seen. Dipperflight jumped as he felt sudden warming licks, and he looked over to see Stonevine vigorously grooming his wet fur in the opposite direction.

"You need to get dry quickly before you get sick. I'm sure Heatherberry doesn't want to spend his herbs on something preventable like this," she murmured, though her expression read something along the lines of stress from disorganization, as she tended to get.

"What-- what happened...?" He whispered. *I jumped in. I tried to save Dandelionpaw. I... I was pulled out.*

"A RiverClan patrol was within earshot when we were calling out to you, they didn't even hesitate. Just like you... That was amazing, what you did. You didn't even think about yourself--" Stonevine cut herself off, her green eyes falling to the ground, and she quickly resumed drying the brown tabby. "I should've done that," she finished after a moment of thought.

Dipperflight blinked slowly. His muscles ached, and his lungs were burning. *It was reckless and stupid... I shouldn't have done anything like Fennelstorm had said to do.*

"Sorrelleap went to go grab Heatherberry from camp, they shouldn't be too long." Stonevine finished. He perked his ears as he saw Dandelionpaw blink into consciousness, her green eyes wide with shock and confusion, the bloody cut just below her right ear a sharp contrast to her pale coat.

"She should be alright...," the gray RiverClan tom meowed, turning. His coat had already started drying, the water droplets having mostly rolled right off his waterproof fur.

"Thank you," Dipperflight meowed quietly, lowering his head.

"I could never let another cat drown in any of the rivers we patrol!" The small black tom grinned brightly, pouncing closer with white paws and a shine in his gold eyes.

"ThunderClan thanks you for your help." Stonevine dipped her head deeply.

"It wasn't a problem." The gray cat assured brightly before the small black and white tom could give off another proud line. "Are you okay?" They asked, taking a closer step to inspect Dipperflight. "Sometimes cats will scrape their paws on the rocks on the bottom if they push off the riverbed. I've scratched myself a few times, too," they picked up a paw, old, small, faint scratches. He couldn't help but notice a fresh scratch on his forepaw that had blood beading its edges.

"No, I'm fine... I think." The dark tabby mumbled. *Fennelstorm wouldn't want me talking to RiverClan cats. Even if they did save me.* The gray cat tipped his head to the side.

"Sagecloud, should we get back to our side? Or wait for their medicine cat?" The last RiverClan cat meowed quietly. He was quite large, with a brown tabby and white coat.

Sagecloud nosed the air towards the forest line. Dipperflight glanced over his shoulder, as his back was to the woods. A gray tabby tom led the way, a bundle of herbs in his mouth, Fennelstorm quickly padding just behind him along with the dark ginger Sorrelleap.

"Heatherberry, right?" Sagecloud stepped away to meet the ThunderClan medicine cat, Fennelstorm making a bee-line straight for Dipperflight.

"What happened?" His fur was slightly on end, and his green eyes

carefully watched the three RiverClan cats with suspicion.

"Dandelionpaw fell into the river-- it was an accident...."

"Why are you wet?" The ginger tabby inquired, his eyes leaving them for just a moment, just long enough to fall onto his mate with a darkness.

Dipperflight looked down to the grassy earth below him, which was damp and flattened.

"I went after her..--" Fennelstorm sighed.

"How could you be so reckless?" He growled sharply. "That was so stupid. You know you can't swim! Did you think you were a fish all of a sudden?" The ThunderClan warrior couldn't meet his gaze.

"Hey! He did something none of your other clanmates were brave enough to do!" He looked up sharply, surprised to see all eyes on the pair. Heatherberry looked ultimately confused, and Stonevine's eyes were narrowed. Sagecloud's fur was slightly on end, his warm brown eyes challenging as he spoke.

Fennelstorm froze. In a flash though, he was nonchalantly waving his tail, his head low and shaking.

"Dipperflight, I'm so sorry it's just-- the stress. It gets so hard sometimes.. It won't happen again." The black and white RiverClan warrior scoffed lightly. Sagecloud's eyes were still narrowed, but he turned back to Dandelionpaw and Heatherberry, still occasionally glancing back to Dipperflight. "You know I love you," Fennelstorm added, quieter. "You're my mate, you *know* I'm the only one that truely loves you." Dipperflight blinked. Dandelionpaw was helped to her paws, and the RiverClan trio turned to swim back across the water. Stonevine kept a weary eye on him as well before starting off towards the forest.

Dipperflight didn't say anything, he just followed the line of clanmates. *Sometimes I feel like love isn't as great as everyone makes it out to be. Fennelstorm says he loves me.. If this is what loves feels like...* He looked down at the ground, his eyes narrowing with a pang. *I*

don't want any part of it.

//
AN
Me: I'm going to do a Nanowrimo! It'll be a bit slower paced, but I'll try to get it done in one month!
Me: *november 13* this isnt working

IM SO SORRY IM SLOWWWW I try so hardddd also I feel like this is a really weak chapter. I could've fit more emotion into it but I just suck and I wanted to get this up so that I don't feel guilty about not updating.

four

[image] [image]

"Are you alright?" Dipperflight's eyes snapped all the way open, his muscles tensing.

"What...?" He whispered, glancing over. Dawnwhisker stood in the entrance to the medicine den where Dipperflight was laying in a nest. The dark gray-brown and ginger patched tabby padded further into the den.

"Are you alright?" She repeated, head tilting to the side. "You were just staring off into space...." Dipperflight twitched an ear, setting his head back in his paws and relaxing.

"Yeah, I'm fine...," he murmured. Dawnwhisker quirked an eyebrow.

"Then why are you in the *medicine den*?" She stood in front of him now, pale green eyes confused.

"Fennelstorm thinks I should stay here for the day, in case I caught a cold or.. Something." He blinked slowly. Dawnwhisker swished her tail.

"Hm. I don't see any reason for it, but then again I'm not a medicine cat or an overly-concerned lover." She settled down, nosing toward where Dandelionpaw was sleeping across the stone den, a poultice and cobwebs slathered to the injury on her head. "Sorrelleap sent me here to check out Dandelionpaw for her. She feels horrible about what happened, and she's too afraid to come and see for herself." Dawnwhisker groomed her chest fur.

"Dandelionpaw was talking this morning about wanting to train, but Heatherberry said she needed to rest in case she had some 'lingering injury.'" He informed, laying a bit more comfortably to face the warrior.

"Ah. I'll probably just tell Sorrelleap that she's fine; I don't want

her to feel worse about it."

"You don't know if that's completely true, though," the pale-muzzled tom meowed, confused.

"I don't, but I know that it's what she wants to hear, it's what we all want to believe. Besides, honestly, she probably *will* be alright. Oh! Did I tell you about that time I fell in the river? It wasn't as cold and scary and bloody as when Dandelionpaw fell in, but I still got wet and," Dipperflight spaced out, his mind concentrating on the first part of what she had said. *It's what she wants to hear, it's what we all want to believe.*

"Anyway, I need to go now, I'm supposed to be fixing a leak in the warriors den," she huffed, "hopefully Fennelstorm doesn't get on my tail. If he does, I'll just say I came to see you!" She purred brightly, whisking away in a whirl of short calico fur.

Dipperflight watched her depart for a moment before setting his head back in his paws. *'I love you,' Fennelstorm says that all the time. He must love me though-- cats that love you don't save you like he saved me back then..* Dipperflight's eyelids half-closed once again, memories sweeping over him.

It had been a season earlier shortly after he had become a warrior, during leaf-bare. Greencough had swept through the ThunderClan camp, bringing death in its wake. Dipperflight sat in camp, his head bowed, a small cry escaping his lips, eyes barely open as he watched the elders carefully carry his dead father out of camp. The thick black tom's yellow eyes were clouded over, his fur matted with sickness and pelt frozen from lack of warming blood-flow. The white-muzzled warrior watched his parent be hauled out of camp, his gaze falling back to the ground.

Tears welled up in his amber eyes, wanting to spill out but he wished with all his might to keep it together. Keep it together. You'll be okay. Sorrelpaw and Dawnpaw's mother died a week ago and they're back to apprentice duties. *He shut his eyes tightly, fat drops spilling down his striped cheeks in the cold, grey half-light of the day.* I don't know if I'll ever be okay..I'll be all alone now without him--

"Hey... Dipperflight.." He is eyes flashed open, and glanced up. A

ginger warrior, just a few moons little older than himself. Fennelstorm. Dipperflight didn't usually talk to the well-muscled tom, usually keeping to himself, but here he was, green eyes soft and patient. "I'm sorry about Ravenfur. I know how hard it must be but...," he rested his head on top of Dipperflight's, and the dark brown tabby tom took half a moment before leaning into the embrace, "I'll be here for you. Always."

Dipperflight glanced up, eyes dull. He spotted Heatherberry, as he did so. The gray tabby medicine cat crouched over Dandelionpaw, carefully looking her herb dressings over as she slept. The tom's pale green irises swept over to lock with the warrior's and he padded over, head tilted high and eyes slightly narrowed in confusion.

"What are you still doing in the medicine den? Are you not feeling well?" He questioned, sitting down in the neat and orderly way he always did. Dipperflight sat up as well.

"No.. I.." He glanced over before meeting the striped tom's eyes. *No use lying to him.* "Fennelstorm told me to stay in the medicine den today. Just in case." Heatherberry rolled his eyes.

"His over-protectiveness is starting to get out of paw. You're perfectly fine, go hunt or whatever you warriors like to do when you aren't patrolling." Dipperflight opened his mouth in protest.

"No, Fennelstorm *told* me to stay here for the day." He stated again, eyes earnest. Heatherberry flicked an ear in slight, mostly controlled frustration.

"And he'll have to get over himself. You go do what you want *besides* stay in here. Go follow Fennelstorm around, go play games with Lionfur's kits. I don't care." The amber-eyed warrior swallowed, his paws kneading the moss best he was in.

"But.. Fennelsto--"

"He shouldn't be so worried about you," Heatherberry narrowed his eyes, "he should be more concerned with his clanmates than if you ate a thrush at sunhigh." He raised his tail beckoning with his head. "Go on, before you wake Dandelionpaw." Dipperflight got to his

paws.

"It's just his way of showing that he loves me...," Dipperflight mumbled as he began to pad off.

"Giving you gifts, physical affection, their spare time, kind words.. Those are ways to show affection." Heatherberry watched the ThunderClan warrior leave the den, and Dipperflight refused to look back, though he did manage to catch the wise medicine cat's final words. "Excessively controlling you is *not* showing you anything close to love. You know that right?" Dipperflight flicked an ear in acknowledgement.

I feel like deep down, I know that already but... He looked over to where Fennelstorm was already approaching with look that was somehow both curious and furious in his eye.

Like Dawnwhisker said. 'I love you,' is what I hear from Fennelstorm, and it's what I want to believe. I want to believe it so much because I know I'm a bad, disobedient, unaffectionate mate. I want to believe it so much because I know, even deeper down...

Fennelstorm isn't that great of a mate either.

//
An
Yes I did throw in a bit of art there. Bet you weren't expecting that >:-0
Also I feel like I'm rushing his development a bit but there's no going back lol.

five

[image]

The forest was cold. It had grown considerably chillier in the few weeks since his dip in the river; leaf-bare was closing in with sharp teeth and narrowed eyes. Dipperflight fluffed up his coat as another wind gusted through the shaded territory, sending brown, crunchy leaves flying off the floor in its wake.

The gust, though unpleasant, brought with it the tantalizing sent of mouse. Dipperflight dropped to the ground, his eyes scanning the leaf-fall golden foliage until they fell upon a small, dusky brown creature. It was quite full bodied, it's tiny forepaws rooting through the scuffed earth as it searched for something.

The hunter slowly crept forward, his ears foreword, large paws lightly landings on the earth with a silence. The mouse paused, and in a slight panic, he leaped, landing just barely close enough to grab the mouse with his claws, nipping it's neck quickly.

He whispered his thanks to StarClan, his heart racing with exhilaration. *I bet Plumkit and Cypresskit would love this mouse, they're always asking me to bring one back to camp!* He paused, eyes growing round with anxiety. *OH STARCLAN. Fennelstorm told me to stay in camp today he's going to freak--* He paused, regaining his composure with a deep breath. *It's fine. It's fine. He's a good cat, he'll be okay with it.* He breathed all the way out, peacefulness pushing away the fear, being replaced by a liveliness. *Fennelstorm is a good cat. He'll understand.*

His senses felt so alive with the thought-- everything seemed to be clicking lately. *I can make this work with Fennelstorm, I understand everything now, I understand that he's not the nicest. I'll help him to see it though, like he helped me when Ravenfur died, and maybe I can be a better mate too.* He picked up the mouse, a bright gleam in his amber eyes. *Everything's going to work out.*

He turned, tabby tail high, but let out a small shriek of surprise as

he turned muzzle-to-muzzle with Fennelstorm himself.

"Dipperflight!" His words were like venom, spitting out of his mouth like an adder hissing when threatened. His fur, the color of fallen leaves, was on end, his hackles high, green eyes leering, and sharp teeth baring.

The brown tabby's heart was already racing from the shock of nearly running into to the tom, and he felt his heart drop, stepping back a few paces. *This is really bad. I was really wrong. This is really, really bad. He told me to stay in camp today no, no, no, I didn't think th--*

Fennelstorm closed the fox-length gap between them in an instant. His forepaw raised, slashing down. Dipperflight jumped back slightly as it happened, the blow landing on his cheek. A sharp pain shot through his face, and dark red blood weakly spurt out from the wound. His heart that once seemed to be racing now seemed to have completely stopped. His pupils were contracted, his muscles tense. His weakly looked up to his mate, his brown tabby face completely horrified.

Fennelstorm was still fuming with anger, but an unreadable looks flashed in his eyes. It quickly faded as he bared his teeth.

"I told you to stay in camp you piece of fox-dung," he growled, olive green eyes still holding a hint of anger.

"I-I'm sorry--!" Dipperflight croaked, lowing himself to the ground, his tail tucking. "I didn't mean to--"

"Really? I feel like you *did* mean to. StarClan, you're so *dull.* What kind of mate are you; you do everything I tell you not to do. All I do is be good to you and you just-- do *this.*" He bared his teeth. "I should leave your rat-hearted pelt." Dipperflight shook his head quickly, his eyes widening.

"P-please don't!" He cried, shaking, taking a step to press his face into the ginger tabby's chest. "Please don't leave me." *I don't want to be alone--! I don't want to be without love. Everything just hurts too much when you're all alone...!*

Fennelstorm curled his lip, shoving the warrior away as he took a step back.

"Cats who love you are supposed to forgive you-- they're supposed to be kind and--" the dark tabby started.

"I *am* forgiving you. Obviously. I haven't *left* you," the deputy looked him up and down before turning, tail high. "You've got a hairball for a brain. Why are you even being so rude as to talk back to me: the caring mate that *loves* you?" He growled. Dipperflight's gaze fell to the ground.

"I-I don't know...."

He could barely feel the sting of his cheek over the terrible gut-retching churning at his stomach. "Fennelstorm I'm sorry..." He whispered again. Fennelstorm turned his head ever so slightly, his eyes narrowed.

"If any other cat had you for a mate they would've left you by now. You're lucky to have me." He reminded with a scoff. "Get back to camp. *Now*." The dark tom hastily nodded, quickly padded past in the direction of camp without looking back, the mouse laying forgotten.

six

[image]

Dipperflight wearily laid at the edge of camp, carefully watching Fennelstorm. The ginger tom was on the other side of camp, chatting brightly to a few she-cats. His eyes briefly left Stonevine's face to glance across the camp to Dipperflight. The brown tabby dropped his gaze at once, his ears flicking back.

The scratch on his cheek from two days previous didn't hurt as much anymore, but the mark hadn't faded in the slightest. Heatherberry had been surprised to see the tom come in with a scratch, claiming it was from falling in a bramble bush. Dipperflight was surprised he said it, too. *I should've said what really happened. Heatherberry would've tried to help me... But Fennelstorm is just too strong. Fennelstorm could cut through Heatherberry in a second and then he would hurt me again--*

He jumped at the sound of a leaf crunching under an approaching cat's paw, bringing him out of his thoughts. Dawnwhisker raised an eyebrow with amused confusion.

"You're pretty jumpy today...," she noted as she neared. "Wow, that bramble bush really got you...!" She looked closer at the scratch. Dipperflight lightly recoiled, and the calico sat down with a small apology. "Sorry, Dip! I've been working on personal space lately, Fennelstorm told me that I always edge up too close to others." She swished her tail across the earth. Dipperflight gave a small nod. *Fennelstorm. Fennelstorm judged her. She listened.*

"You aren't really that bad," he noted quietly. Dawnwhisker gave a small smile.

"Hm. I guess you're right. Besides, what's wrong with being a bit too close to your clanmates?" She purred brightly, bouncing to her paws and playfully running her head on his shoulder up to under his chin. He let out a weak, half-hearted laugh, not even wanting to see if Fennelstorm had witnessed the joking caress. Dawnwhisker

sat back down, her eyes half closed with a purr.

"How's ShadowClan been? You went on a border patrol this morning over there, right?" Dipperflight tried to sway the topic off of Fennelstorm, his fur beginning to prickle at the thought of the tom's glare.

"Not as dangerous as bramble bushes, apparently," she gave a sly smile as she referenced his 'accident' that never happened. He gave a small, fake chuckle, his head ducking. She purred again. "They were fine. There was an apprentice on their patrol though, they said he'd just became an apprentice this moon and he was *huge*. Seriously! Massive! I'd never want him an an opponent he could probably kill me with a cuff over the ear!" Dipperflight laughed again, but his mind stil wondered to a certain ginger tom. His eyes shifted slightly off of the talking caliby, over to the hard-muscled deputy.

He was staring right back.

Dipperflight ducked his head, heart beating quicker.

"He was really quiet though, the other apprentice on the patrol was really talking this kit up to be some amazing StarClan sent fighter, but his mentor kept telling him to stop being a frog-brain. Do you ever think it's weird that ShadowClan says frog-brain instead of mouse-brain?" Dawnwhisker laughed at her own thought. The brown tabby gave a stiff nod, barely listening. "Hey.. Dipperflight? Bud?" She waved a paw in front of his face, her pale amber eyes full. "You okay?"

"Yeah...," he murmured. "I'm just.. Tired, that's all. Healing from bramble scratches, it really takes a toll on you...," he lied. His heart ached from having to lie to one of his favorite friends, and he yearned to just say it. But he couldn't. *Fennelstorm might hurt anyone who knows the truth*. Dawnwhisker suspiciously cocked an eyebrow. *I refuse to let Dawnwhisker get hurt because of me.*

"Ah. Okay. Which bramble patch was it? I can go avenge you if you'd like?" Dipperflight shook his head. *It wasn't a bramble patch.*

"I can't remember." *It was Fennelstorm.*

"Hm. Was it that really huge one by the Sandy Hollow? That one's *huge,* I've fallen in that one before!" *Fennelstorm did it.*

"Maybe. I really can't remember." *Fennelstorm hurt me. Fennelstorm is bad. Fennelstorm is scary.*

"Well, if you suddenly remember we can both go out and teach it a lesson!" She held up an unsheathed paw, and Dipperflight shook his head quickly.

"No need for claws!" He yipped, bouncing to his paws lightly. *Fennelstorm hurt me. He could hurt you too.* Dawnwhisker tipped her head to the side, setting her small, white paw back down on the ground.

"It's a joke, Dipperflihht.. are you sure you're alright?" She stood, and Dipperflight nodded a bit too quickly.

"Yeah I just-- I need to drink something." He passed the warrior towards the bramble exit, Fennelstorm cutting him off. "I'm just getting something to drink." Dipperflight backed up, keeping a distance between the two. His heart raced, muscles tensing. Fennelstorm twitched an ear.

"Don't be long." Without hesitating, he made his way around the ginger tom, breaking into a run as he left the camp.

I can't do this anymore. I can't constantly be afraid of Fennelstorm, everything I do-- he's there. Somehow. I just-- I can't do this. I can't be here in ThunderClan anymore. Dipperflight looked ahead. The RiverClan border was ahead, and beyond RiverClan territory was WindClan, and the twoleg barn, and Mothermouth and beyond that... *My mentor always told me not to run from my problems but...* he glanced over his shoulder. He could barely make out the hidden camp that blended with the rest of the foliage.

In this instance.. I feel like it's the best option.

//

I didn't mean to publish this until tonight but I accidentally pressed publish oops. Might as well keep it up.

seven

[image] [image]

Dipperflight blinked, a sick feeling settling in his stomach. His eyes looked across the river before him, bubbling and laughing at his non-swimming self. Rocks jutted out, nearly forming a straight line, and he figured he could cross if jumped far enough but.... He stepped out onto the first stone, but the confidence that he had possessed for the run to the border had ebbed away. *What if Fennelstorm follows me? What if fall into the river? What if a patrol picks me up?* He looked over his shoulder, his muscles tense. *Fennelstorm could be coming any second now. He's probably realized I'm not back yet and....*

Dipperflight's breathing quickened, and he recklessly bounded from stepping stone to stepping stone, fear moving him through the near-impossible jumps rather than the confidence he had once held moments earlier. *I just have to cross RiverClan territory.. I think... I've never had to go to Mothermouth.*

Panic set in. He started racing though the foreign territory, the cold, heavily fishy scented wind hitting his striped pelt mercilessly. *I can just cross over onto WindClan territory up where the borders meet. It'll be okay. I can make it out of the territories. Where will I even be going? To live with other loners?* He blindly ran following he river's edge, his pelt prickling as water sloshed mouse-lengths away to his right side, lush grass on his right. The river kept going though, and going and going... there weren't any breaks, there weren't any other crossings....

He skidded to a slower pace, though, as he noticed a twoleg path hiding. He looked back and forth. The path bridged over the water, and he cautiously edged forward toward it. The bridge was solid, like a tree fallen over a creek. He gingerly set a paw down on it's smooth surface before pulling his paw back. *What if it breaks..? It won't break though, right? Twolegs are heavy, they wouldn't make their paths weak....* He set his paw down again, with a bit more of

determination, but his face fell with horror as he heard a sound.

"Hey! Hey you, ThunderClan! What are you doing?!" He looked over his shoulder, eyes huge as he saw a RiverClan patrol trotting toward him, made up of the two cats who had rescued Dandelionpaw, a flame red apprentice, and a golden and white tabby tom. *Gotta go, gotta go!* He started off quickly across the bridge, as his paws touched he other side he felt a cat jump onto him, knock on him to his paws. He blearily jumped to his paws, eyes wild as he looked at the orange apprentice. His eyes were shining with excitement, wild fur on end.

"What do you think you're doing on RiverClan territory? And so far in?" The small, mostly black and white tom was the next of the patrol to arrive, his gold eyes bright and narrowed. "Nice job, Foxpaw, that was faster than usual!" He noted to the ginger tom. The small apprentice gave a nod, eyes still focused on the newcomer.

"I-- you've got to let me go, I'm just passing through, I'm not here to steal any prey--!" Dipperflight' fur was on end as he cast a glance over the ThunderClan border.

"We can't let you do that." The golden and white tabby meowed as he finally caught up with the last cat of the patrol at his side.

Dipperflight's eyes widened as he recognized the golden tabby. *Rushfrost, RiverClan's deputy! I remember seeing him when I used to go to gatherings....* Rushfrost wasn't a very large tom, sporting a scar on his white foreleg.

"No, please, just let me through!" Dipperflight begged, crouching low, eyes wide. *Fennelstorm could be coming any second now, I need to go.* Rushfrost glanced to the large brown tabby at his side before letting his gaze fall on the brown tabby, his green eyes soft.

"We can't let you just run through our territory. Why don't you come back to camp with us. You can get something to eat, calm down, and we can work something out. Alright?" Dipperflight shook his head. *Fennelstorm will still find me in RiverClan. He'll probably*

walk right into camp and he'll skin me right there-- "Hey, kid." Rushfrost snapped him out of his thoughts, and he looked up at the deputy. "I don't know what the duck is going on with you," Foxpaw let out an inaudible gasp at the word that was typically used as a curse, "but I do know that our camp is very safe. You'll be safe. Whatever you're afraid of...," he waved his tail, looking over to the ThunderClan border, "it can't get you."

"Not on our watch!" The golden-eyed black warrior chipped in brightly, though a sense of intensity lingered in his voice. *I... It could be good for my scent trail to get muddled...*

He gave a firm nod.

"I can't stay long...," he mumbled, but the fiery red Foxpaw was bouncing on his white paws with excitement.

"wOW we're going to have a *real* ThunderClan warrior in our camp! Oh! Ravenpaw will be so jealous that I caught him--" he ducked his head sheepishly as Rushfrost shot him a sharp glare, and he muttered an apology.

"I'm Rushfrost, and this is Hazelstream," he motioned to the large, long bodied, pale brown tabby, who waved his tail, "this is Stormcall," the black tom with white bounced into the air with a wide smile and a hello, "and you've met Foxpaw...," the ginger apprentice gave a small nod, still aware of the deputy's authoritative presence.

"I'm Dipperflight..." he murmured, following the patrol as they started off, his amber eyes casting glances back to the ThunderClan border. So far he hadn't caught sight of the ginger tabby, but he knew far well that he *could* be there. Slinking in the shadows. Blending in the bracken. Watching. Following. Always there. Physically or just mentally. Always ordering, always scoffing, always stalking.

Dipperflight hastily followed the patrol, his pelt burning under the fear of unseen eyes.

//
AN

SORRY NOT SORRY

i photoshopped it myself. be proud of me.

Also now that's it's relevant, some (a lot) of the RiverClan characters are based off of characters from Haikyuu. I'm going through a phase don't judge me guys. In case you were wondering or like Haikyuu, Foxpaw is based off of Hinata, Stormcall is Nishinoya, Hazelstream is Asahi, and Sagecloud from earlier is based off Suga. The other characters in RiverClan are much, much, muuuuchhh looser based off of haikyuu people, it's mainly just these guys mentioned. If I forgot one I'll be sure to note it in the AN if they appear

HAPPY THANKSGIVING DWEEBS LOL ILY IM SO PROUD OF THIS UPDATE STREAK I'VE GOT GOING SORRY THAT I'M NEGLECTING DICTATOR THO

eight

[image]

Silence met Dipperflight as he set paw into the reed-encircled camp, the patrol at his side. His legs were wet from wading through the stream that surrounded the RiverClan base, the cold, late leaf-bare winds turning his wet fur to ice. In the center of camp where reeds and sedge didn't grow, along the edges of dens, RiverClan clanmates were sharing tongues, though they had stopped mid-groom and sentence, their eyes focused on him. Slowly, hackles rose.

Dipperflight ducked his head, his eyes round and pupils dilated with raw terror. *What was I thinking? I'm literally in another Clan's camp right now. They could kill me without breaking a sweat.* His eyes swept over the camp, easing over the smaller cats and setting up his fears of death at the sight of the few tall ones. Rushfrost stepped forward, pale, sun-colored tabby and white fur fluffed to combat the chill.

"This is Dipperflight. We picked him up at the border; he's perfectly safe. He just needs a place to rest for a little," Rushfrost meowed, his eyes piercing as they met every single clanmate. Slowly, murmuring picked up again, and the bicolor deputy led Dipperflight through the camp toward a willow tree that was rooted near the back of the small, well-drained island. The gazes of the sleek warriors followed him carefully, icy cold. He recognized a few cats from gatherings, though he couldn't find that tom who had saved him the river nearly a half moon previously.

Rushfrost led the patrol to the the knotted willow roots, Stormcall and Hazelstream breaking off to sit with a golden and white tabby and a gray and white tom, the latter giving a dark, intimidating glare. The pale golden frosted deputy paused, raising his tail.

"Wait here for a moment," he murmured, disappearing into a den situated under the safety of the roots, tall grass poking up in tufts

between the ancient willow base. Dipperflight gave a stiff nod, casting a glance back to the gray and white tom, who was still staring.

"Don't mind Breamclaw, he always gets all 'I'm scary' to strangers, but his heart's really just made of reed-fluff," Foxpaw informed brightly. Dipperlflight gave a deft nod. *I'm sure a lot of cats can come across as reed-fluffy, but really...,* he blinked, turning his gaze away from the dark stare of Breamclaw, *not all cats are actually nice when you give them all your trust.*

"Foxpaw!" A cat called from across the camp. "Did Rushfrost decide if you're fuzz-brained yet?" Foxpaw's fur stood on end slightly with embarrassment as he looked across to the clearing to muscled gray tabby tom streaked with white.

"Ah-- He hasn't said yet..!" He called back without nearly as much enthusiasm. The ginger apprentice looked up to Dipperflight, yellow-green eyes shifting to the earth with with embarrassment. "That's my mentor, Owlheart... I've gotta go talk to him," Foxpaw mumbled before turning tail, dashing across the camp, leaving a breeze in his wake. He narrowed his eyes with confusion, but before a proper thought of 'what..?' could come to mind, he heard his name be called.

"Dipperflight..?" Pawsteps sounded from the willow's roots, and Rushfrost poked out of the den, yellow eyes bright. He pushed himself out, and was briskly followed by a large, white cat.

Their fur was long, and had the same healthy sleekness as the other RiverClan cats, though silvery fur edged their aged, green eyes and square muzzle. Scars tattered their ears and blended with their snow-colored pelt, and their paws were large and toes webbed. It was Daisystar, the oldest of all the leaders. *They're huge. They're huge. They're so big. Bigger than Fennelstorm-- ...Fennelstorm.* Dipperflight's eyes darkened as the memories of the tom flooded back in, and he cowered lower to the ground. He knew they had never really left, just gotten pushed away since he had set paw into the water-loving clan camp. *Fennelstorm could probably still shred the last few lives out of this cat, either using his claws, spitting words, or his eyes. His piercing, scary eyes. He could show up here any second, he*

could've easily followed my scent trail--

"So, *you're* the Dipperflight my deputy has been telling me about the past few moments." The leader blinked slowly, looking the ThunderClan warrior up and down. "Got a scratch on your cheek?" They noted, expression unreadable. "Do you need to see Wrenleaf?" Dipperflight shook his head quickly, and he bowed his striped head to try and not feel the burning questions that hummed in Daisystar's gaze.

There was silence for a few moments, though the gentle flow of water lightly gurgled at the edge of the camp's dense reed wall a few foxlengths from where he stood. Daisystar gave a short sigh.

"I remember you. Vaguely, but I do," he paused, his green eyes softening, "I remember when Oatstar had announced you were a new warrior. I was more worried about another possible ThunderClan enemy than needing to know for a future acquaintance; I usually try to remember all new warrior announcements for that same reason.

"But you were proud back then. Sleek. Muscled," he noted the dullness of the ThunderClan warrior's coat, and the slimmer frame than what it used to be. "You've come across something terrible, something that's made you run. I don't know if it was you who did something and ThunderClan has exiled you, I don't know if you're just running from a battle with another clan. You may stay in our camp, only on the condition that you allow our apprentices to feed and take care of you. Perhaps Foxpaw? He seemed a lot less hyper when he was speaking with you." Dipperflight raised his head to meet the leader's eyes as he realized what was happening. *Refuge. I can be away from... him.* Rushfrost stood off to the side slightly, looking smug and proud of his leader's actions. Dipperflight blinked slowly. Now he could recognize that look in the old cat's face....

It was compassion.

His breath caught in his through, and he dipped his head as deep as he could.

"Thank you, Daisystar!" He cried out. Many of the cats watching

from a distance lit up with interest. The white leader waved their plumy tail.

"Let all of RiverClan listen and know," Daisystar called out, their voice loud and clear. "This warrior, Dipperflight will be taking shelter in our camp. He will be protected, cared for, and respected, as he has been through just as much if not more than you, and more than deserves our help." The cats all blinked slowly, slightly confused, but obliging the leader's commands. Daisystar waved their tail again, and chatter started up in the mid-day air.

"You can stay in the overhang off of the warrior's den," Rushfrost meowed, "if you want something private, that is." He nosed in the general direction of a thickly woven reed den, sedge grass densely surrounding it, pooling up on the right side of the warrior's shelter in a small den-like overhang. "It should work for the time being. Foxpaw and the other apprentices can make it more comfortable for you." The pale golden and white tom settled down in a sit, his short, feathery fur gently billowing in the cold breeze.

"Thank you," Dipperflight murmured. "You don't think though...," unease entered his voice, his eyes unsure as he glanced to the ground. "...You don't think a cat could ever possibly break into the camp though..?" Rushfrost let out a small chuckle, shaking his head slowly.

"No way. The entire camp is surrounded by the stream, and the only crossable part for a cat who can't swim would be that thin stretch of sandbar that you waded through to get into camp. The odds of some other cat finding it without even knowing beforehand are slimmer than a WindClan cat during Leaf-Bare." He glanced up to the densely clouded sky before standing. *But Fennelstorm is smart. He could figure it out, he could break into camp.*

Rushfrost continued on, waving his tail, "I've gotta go report to Owlheart. Foxpaw came on patrol with me today because he's terrible at comprehending directions and listening in general," he meowed flatly, "He thinks with his claws, even though he's not strong enough to swim through a current. I'll see you later, probably," he shook his head lightly as he explained, padding toward where Owlheart was playfully pouncing at the bright ginger

apprentice, who yipped with happiness.

Dipperflight blinked and slowly padded to the den that was said to be his. He glanced over in the direction of Stormcall, Hazelstream, Breamclaw, and the other golden and white she-cat, Stormcall waving his tail as he walked by.

I think, even though I ran away, I'm only kind of safe. The chances of Fennelstorm coming for me are slim, but he's probably already looking for me. Teeth bared. Claws sharp. He'll probably grab me and drag me back to ThunderClan to be like we were before, maybe even worse than before. I don't think I could ever hurt him either-- even though he hurt me and he's not a very good guy...

...he still is the only living cat who's ever loved me.

//
AN
IM SO SORRY I ACCIDENTALLY POSTED THIS UNFINISHED YESTERDAY. I'm really sorry @ all of you who got down to that part where Daisystar pops up and it just cuts off I'm so sorry it was an accident. Rip.

nine

[image] [image]

"I stole this one from Beepaw's part of the den. Hopefully she doesn't notice, but your den is just so bare!" Foxpaw meowed as he pad up. The sun had fallen half-way down the sky, and the clouds had rolled down with it. Dipperflight gave a small nod, his eyes focused ahead to where the camp entrance would be, if the nursery hadn't been blocking his view he would've had the perfect view. "It's one of my favorite things, even though it isn't mine. Beepaw's really nice though; she'd be happy to share it." The ginger tom pulled all the way up to Dipperflight's make shift den.

The apprentice had barely scrapped moss together before getting distracted, saying he needed to get something else. Dipperflight twitched an ear as he saw what Foxpaw had set down; a shiny two-leg thing. It was mangled like a fox had gotten ahold of it, mostly silvery and shiny, but it had deep sky blue patches. Dipperflight wrinkled his nose, the twoleg object crinkling with a strange sound.

"You keep twoleg objects in your dens..?" He meowed quietly, confused. Foxpaw twitched an ear with slight ununderstanding before his eyes widened with sudden insight.

"Woah, you don't put cool stuff up in your dens in ThunderClan?!" He jumped into the air with excitement. Dipperflight shook his head, and the brightly pelted apprentice calmed down enough to start weaving the scrap into the reed overhang that rooted his small den. "We put all kinds of cool stuff in our den. Beepaw and I both have flowers weaved in our nests, Ravenpaw won't admit it but he really likes to look at them, and Gorsepaw keeps shells in his area. I would too, but I can never find any really cool or pretty ones like him." He sighed, pulling away. Dipperflight blinked, reeling from the onslaught of names of cats he didn't know.

"But why keep something like that if you don't really need it..?" He murmured. Foxpaw thought for a moment before shrugging.

"I like it," he meowed simply. Dipperflight glanced at the shredded shiny twolegs thing woven slightly above his head. *Am I something useless that Fennelstorm kept around just to look at?* "Oh! Do you smell that? It's the hunting patrol; Ravenpaw's on it! Hang on, stay right here, he's going to *flip,* it'll be really cool!" He launched away on white paws toward the entrance to camp, which was the thinnest part of the dense reed wall.

It was quiet for half a moment before Dipperflight heard the sharp "No way! You're lying!" from somewhere near the entrance, and then a pummeling of paws running towards him.

A young black tom came into view, his short, sleek black fur ruffled and deep green eyes narrowed. Dipperflight quickly recoiled, his fur fluffing up as well. Foxpaw strode in right after the dark apprentice, with cocky grin.

"No way. No way you caught a ThunderClan warrior. You're not even strong enough to push me to the ground!" The black apprentice growled, his tail lashing with satisfaction. Dipperflight glanced down to his paws. *Oh. Oh boy. I'm such a bad warrior, even RiverClan's weakest apprentice was able to bring me down back when the patrol got me....*

"I did! Dipperflight is cool though, Ravenpaw-- do you know they don't collect things for their dens in ThunderClan?" Foxpaw glowed with energy, his eyes alight as he spoke to the larger apprentice.

"Of course they don't, stone-head, all clans are different." Dipperflight's fur flattened as he realized Ravenpaw wasn't a threat anymore, and as the night pelted RiverClan cat shifted just right, he caught a glimpse of a large scar across his right shoulder. The dark apprentice noticed the peek, and he shifted uncomfortably, blinking slowly. "I was in an accident as a kit," he mumbled quietly, drawing his paws close to himself.

"Ah, but a little fall into the low-water riverbed won't stop our Ravenpaw!" Foxpaw jumped, bouncing into the air as he spoke. Ravenpaw glared, but Foxpaw chilled once he caught the uneasy gaze of Dipperflight.

"Foxpaw, Ravenpaw? What are you-- oh. Oh! I remember you! ...Dipperflight, I believe." A gray tom approached, tabby stripes gently rippling across his pale pelt, his warm amber eyes bright. "I didn't realize Rushfrost had put you over here, though I guess it makes a lot of sense."

"Oh, hi... Sagecloud, right?" Dipperflight stood, stepping out of the den. Ravenpaw and Foxpaw both took quick steps back so they weren't blocking his way.

"Yeah! I know, I almost didn't recognize you by your dry pelt, you looked almost all black when you were soaking wet." The tom purred. Dipperflight nodded.

"Um-- you too." He looked down to his paws.

"Were they helping you set up your den?" He meowed, nodding to the shiny twoleg object.

"Yeah! You don't think Beepaw will mind, do you?" Foxpaw leaped in front of Dipperflight, who shuffled backward as the ginger tom moved to be face to face with the slim warrior.

"Don't jump around and cut off guests," he meowed gently before continuing, "you should probably ask her about it. She's very reasonable though, but you can go get on it now." Foxpaw nodded brightly before trotting away toward a thick reed den smelling of mouse bile, old moss bedding setting at the den's entrance.

Ravenpaw looked up to Sagecloud. "Am I done for the day...?" He asked, his nearly low voice rumbling.

"You did wonderfully hunting today, I'm sure Troutface saw and will be okay with it." Ravenpaw gave a firm nod, though a light glimmered in his dark green eyes as he pad off. Dipperflight's eyes softened as he saw the full extent of the scarring on the young tom's right side, stretching from his shoulder muscle across and patchy across his torso and ending at his sharp hipbone, his gait slightly off in his hindquarters. Sagecloud sighed lightly.

"Is he.. okay...?" Dipperflight murmured quietly. "Can he still be a

warrior?" Sagecloud shifted his gaze to the dark tabby.

"He works harder than any other apprentice," He smiled brightly, purring, "he's one of the best ones we have because of it." Dipperflight looked down to his paws, brows scrunching together in thought. *He's so young, and already he has to face the hardships of living.* "You know," he pale gray tabby brought him out of his thoughts, "I've always found Ravenpaw inspirational. I had bad things happen to me, too...," he paused, tensing slightly but pushing through with a bright smile, "but thinking of Ravenpaw... his chances of becoming a normal warrior like you or I were slim to none. But he pulled through. He *fought* and *suffered* and cried to be where he is. To consider him.. it really makes you want to fight, too." Dipperflight picked his gaze up to meet with the warm, soft amber-brown eyes.

"Yeah but...," he breathed, "What do I even have to fight for?" Sagecloud's eyebrows raised. "Do I even have a clan to fight for? I ran away. I ran away from friends and my nonexistent family. I ran away from my fears. I don't have anything."

"You have a future. Cats you haven't met, relationships you haven't formed, old friends, new friends, everything. You never know who or what's going to come. But you can fight for it. Don't ever give up, Dipperflight."

Dipperflight swallowed. *That's all so far away though. Anything could cut it all off any second, and then all of the fighting wouldn't have been worth it.*

"Rushfrost is sending out an extra night patrol, just so you know." Sagecloud meowed before turning to leave, sunset light bathing his light gray fur. "One squirrel-chaser is enough for our territory." He meowed with a teasing smirk. Dipperflight backed up into his den with a slight, awkward smile, his mind on the extra patrol. *It won't be enough to keep Fennelstorm all the way away, but maybe enough to keep him away for the night.*

//
AN

I photoshopped this one too guys. It's Foxpaw. Yeah, if you guessed, the trash he brought for Dippy was a cool ranch doritos bag ahaaa. I love cool ranch Doritos.

Kids are very annoying. I literally could not concentrate to write this because my fam is watching someone else's kids (6 & 3) and they are t h e m o s t annoying creatures to walk the planet. Yeah, some are very sweet and adorable, but these ones are hecka annoying.

Though, Cypresskit and Plumkit (those kits from back in chapter two I think it was) personalities were helped along by the tragically aggravating experiences with these two kids.

I drew a set of character icons, too, if anyone is interested I might post them next chapter. I didn't do Rushfrost or Daisystar though because I made it back before I actually wrote them and fell in love with them.

Anyway, kids and art aside, I hope you enjoyed this chapter and that I didn't make too many errors.

ten

[image]

Sunrise light streaked the sky, early dew clinging to the camp's heavily-trodden flat grass. Fog still hung in the morning air, the sunlight warming it away. Dipperflight felt his fur prick as he heard movement, and he snapped his gaze in the direction of the rustling, his heart racing. His fur fell flat though as he recognized Rushfrost. His light ginger tabby and white fur wasn't smoothed down yet, and his yellow eyes were still clouded with sleep. He yawned, stretching low to the ground, before padding to Dipperflight's humble den.

"How'd you sleep?" He meowed gruffly, settling down across from the tabby to groom his pelt.

"Okay," he lied, his eyes heavy. His body ached with fatigue and his muscles sore. He hadn't slept at all that night.

"Mm," he nosed the moss nest carefully, and Dipperflight edged back as his muzzle came so close to him. "Foxpaw did a lousy job on your nest. I'll have to schedule him to stay in camp and redo it." *Stay in camp. Stay in camp. Contained. Kept away from the outside world.*

"N-No!" He stuttered, eyes wide. "I.. I mean, *no.* It's okay. It's fine." Rushfrost tipped his head to the side, and the black striped tom avoided his questioning look. "He should go out and be an apprentice. Train. Run. Have fun." He half-closed his eyes. *There's no way I'll be the cause of Foxpaw being kept in camp. No way.*

"If you say so. Did you want to go on any patrols? We have a beech copse just further down from here. It's nowhere close to dense undergrowth and tall oaks, but you might still find comfort in it. I know the river is nothing to be comfortable around when you're used to flying through treetops." Rushfrost murmured, laying back down.

There was more movement from the warriors den as another few

cats exited. Dipperflight recognized one as Owlheart, the gray and white mentor to Foxpaw, but the others he had only seen at gatherings. As they passed, a creamy brown tom with dark marks on his face, legs, tail, and ears, cast a sour look in Dipperflight's direction. The brown tabby pulled his legs close to himself, lowering his head. Rushfrost sensed Dipperflight's uncomfortable squirm and his gaze flicked to the warrior.

"*Troutface*, doesn't Ravenpaw need you to wake him up right about now?" The golden and white deputy raised a brow, though his yellow eyes were icy cold. The tom flicked his tail coolly.

"I think Ravenpaw's learned how to wake up by now, but if you insist...," he flashed a glance to the ThunderClan warrior before departing toward the apprentice's reed den across the camp where the other four warriors had gone.

"That was Troutface. He's... particular." Rushfrost's eyes softened as he turned his head back. Dipperflight have a stiff nod. A few moments passed before the bicolor deputy stood, his feathery fur flattened and shining in the sunrise light.

"Feel free to visit the Beech Copse, and don't be afraid to ask a cat to accompany you, if need be. The elders love going out on walks, though Moleclaw might try and hustle you," he purred. "I'm supervising apprentice training, so I'll see you late tonight maybe. Oh, speaking of which," he waved his tail in a hello to Foxpaw as he watched the ginger apprentice groggily step out of the reed and sedge walled nursery, the tom padding the few pace distance to the thinly striped 'paw and asking something along the lines of "How's your sister?"

Dipperflight tucked his head back onto his paws, amber eyes carefully observing the camp wake up. Breamclaw padded out of the warriors den, bickering with the much smaller Stormcall, Hazelstream awkwardly nudging the sleek dark tom to quit quarreling so early in the morning. Dipperflight sniffed, closing his eyes.

I want to go out.. I want to go to the Beech Copse. I want to see if it's really big, if there are squirrels, if there's a lot of undergrowth, if I

could climb the trees. I want to. But I know what lies outside of this camp's walls: Fennelstorm. I'm not safe. Even if I were to leave the clans, it wouldn't be hard for him to track me down.

He blinked his eyes open. All of the apprentices were warming up for the day outside of their den. Foxpaw was vibrantly poking at Ravenpaw, making him get increasingly annoyed, and a pale ginger tabby she-cat was grooming her fur as a second pale ginger tabby tom did the same at her side, the last apprentice of the group, a dark brown tabby tom, meowed brightly to the cleaning siblings. Sagecloud pad up to the group of five, brightly smiling. His fur was smoothed, faint tabby stripes perfectly visible in the morning's rays. *Maybe I could ask Sagecloud to go with me... he seems like he would know how to talk Fennelstorm down if he were to show up. That's possibly the only way to keep Fennelstorm from mauling us all.*

Sagecloud meowed something to the apprentices, and Foxpaw loudly with happiness, the group of young cats standing and padding to the entrance of camp, where their mentors were waiting. Dipperflight's gaze followed them, locking eyes with a pair of pale blue ones. Troutface. The point tom looked away immediately, saying something inaudible to the cats around him with a charming swift flick of his tail, Ravenpaw at his side, before leading the group of cat's out. Sagecloud blinked after them before turning, his amber-brown eyes lighting up as he saw Dipperflight.

"Hey, how's it going?" He meowed as he pad up.

"Ah... fine...," he mumbled. There was a moment of silence, Dipperflight not knowing what to say. *I can't just ask him to take me to the copse, I can't be his obligation.*

"I was just seeing the apprentices off to their training. Gorsepaw always needs a motivation speech in order to actually go a little bit further than his best," he explained, sitting. "The other apprentices, especially Foxpaw, really like it too." Dipperflight blinked.

"Oh, is one of them your apprentice...?" *I hope he didn't skip mentoring his apprentice to kit-sit me. Even out of ThunderClan and in an entirely new place I'm still a burden on everyone....*

"No," Sagecloud shook his head, "but I think I was supposed to get Foxpaw's sister as my apprentice, but she got very, very sick around a moon ago when they turned six moons. She's not sick anymore, but she's still terribly weak. Still not a 'paw." Sagecloud gave a side smile, which had fallen gradually as he had progressed through the story.

Dipperflight mumbled an "oh," silence once more filling the cold morning void.

"Did you want to see the territory at all? Beech Copse is just right around here, I can take you..?" Sagecloud raised his tail, the long fur lightly banded with stripes. Dipperflight hesitated. *Tempting but... why leave the camp? I'll only leave my scent all over the territory and increase the chances of Fennelstorm tracking me back here.* "If anything remotely threatening pops up, I'll give it my all to protect you," he offered again, ambery-brown eyes warm. The ThunderClan warrior glanced to both sides before finally shaking his head.

"I... maybe next time," he murmured, setting his white muzzle in his paws. Sagecloud sighed softly, laying down across from Dipperflight, the wind buffeting his water-repellant fur.

"That's okay. I'm not really the strongest fighter, anyway. Unless a smile could persuade your fears to subside." Dipperflight curled tighter.

"Even the greatest fighter in all of RiverClan couldn't fight him off...," he said softly. Sagecloud blinked slowly, twitching his whiskers. "I don't think he would register what a smile is." He closed his eyes, shutting out all the bough-less skies and reed structures.

"That's too bad. All bad guys have a weakness though, right? Badgers are strong and scary and smelly and fierce, but they're lumberingly slow, and kestrels have brilliant eyesight and quick as WindClan, yet they aren't strong enough to carry a full grown cat. Just try and think of one for whatever you're afraid of."

Nothing. I can't think of anything. Fennelstorm is strong and smart and fast. He's a great tracker, a great everything. He has no heart. None of that could ever be the downfall of anything.

"He doesn't have any weaknesses." Dipperflight mumbled. Sagecloud eyes widened slightly before softening.

"I can definitely see, now, why you're so scared." His voice was soft. Dipperflight turned his head away.

"I-I'm not scared." He growled, feeling a coldness sweep over him. He stood, turning and laying back down again, his thickly striped back facing the gray warrior. He almost thought he could feel the hurt expression of the gently warrior, but he pushed it away. *I'm not something to be pitied or something to be picked at.*

"I... I have to go," the longhaired RiverClan tom whispered, standing quickly and leaving. Dipperflight sniffed, the seething feeling still lingering. He knew it was wrong, and he shouldn't have been angry-- but for some reason he wanted to clutch the burning feeling and hold onto it longer. He *wanted* to be angry. For everything Fennelstorm had done to him, for everything that had happened... he wanted be enraged.

He felt his breath hitch, the coolness of the day gusting the darkness away with a simple thought.

Is... is that how Fennelstorm feels?

//

I've been working on this for a few days, apologies it's pretty late. I was hoping to finish this up over Christmas break because I have no friends and no life, but wowwee wow Christmas break is super short this year, and doesn't start until December 23 for me, going until January 2. :'-) rip.

OOH YEAH. I fixed the cover if you noticed. It had been bothering me forever. Unfortunately the red tint to "Crows" got played down a bit; I'm not sure what I did differently that changed it... I used the same font and technique I don't know what I did??

eleven

[image] [image]

The air smelled thickly of cod, shadows of clouds covering the moist earth of the RiverClan island camp. Dipperflight blinked open his eyes sleepily. Something had woken him up.

"Dipperflight." He sniffed. Was that Sagecloud? He saw a flash of a ginger tabby pelt.

"Foxpaw? What is it?" He craned his neck, gingerly stepping out of his make-shift den to try and get a better glimpse of the ginger apprentice. A pair of green eyes met him in the shadows of the reeds, though. No. That was not the soft yellow-green, curious gaze of the zealous tom. Those eyes were sharp, scrutinizing, and holding a metaphorical darkness in the pupils. "You-You're not Foxpaw...!" Dipperflight's voice rasped out.

"No... I'm not...," they stepped out of the shadows, not even the moonlight daring to outline his frame. Fennelstorm.

"No! Get out of here-- Sagecloud, Rushfrost, Daisystar-- someone!!" He called out, backing up slowly, eyes flicking wildly to the other dens. No cat stirred.

"What's wrong, Dipperflight? You knew this was coming! You can never escape from me. Never."

"No, please, I-I just--"

"You ran away from me. Just know you are the cause of everything bad. Every horrible thing that's going to be happening... it's all your fault*." His voice was sing songy, his eyes half closed as he spoke. The ThunderClan deputy leaped suddenly, a gleam in his eyes. Dipperflight cowered to the ground. The ginger tabby's claws outstretched. His lips pulled back into a snarl. His shadow enveloped the runaway tom.*

Dipperflight gasped awake. His heart was racing. He blinked a

few times before timidly looking up and out of his den. The moon was high, almost half-full and emitting a brilliant light that washed out the closest stars to its surface. His amber gaze swept over the reed barrier, clearly lit up and void of stalking cats. His heart still thrummed in his chest, and he cast a glance to where the warriors den entrance was just barely visible from his small inlet den. He could wake Sagecloud, or maybe Rushfrost. *No. they're busy warriors, they have things to do in the morning. Prey to hunt. Borders to defend.*

A wind whispered through the camp, stirring the reeds and scattering small leaves across camp. He narrowed his eyes. Leaves. The willow tree, the only tree close enough to drop its leaves. The leader's den. *Daisystar. They might not mind if I... maybe they would mind... it's worth a chance.*

Dipperflight stood, slowly at first. His eyes flicked to the nursery, that blocked his view of the camp's entrance, then to the warrior's den where the sounds of sleep warmed the area. He gingerly stalked across the camp, the reed dens and tall sedges all leading to the large willow at the end of the RiverClan island. He swallowed, shutting his eyes as he reached the entrance.

"Daisystar...?" He whispered hoarsely. He paused. *This is dumb I need to go back to my den.* "...Daisystar..?" He tried again a moment later, voice slightly louder. He swallowed, turning. *This was so, so dumb.*

"Come in." His breath hitched, and he turned back to face the gap in the willow's roots. He paused for a second, flicking his dark tipped tail, stepping down into the den under the tree.

The den was dark, but the moonlight flooding in showed it to be a lot roomier than he originally thought it'd be. It was deep enough for the tallest warrior to only just stand comfortably, and it was big enough for several cats to sleep in without feeling cramped.

"Rain washed it out back in the time of LeopardClan. Legend passes on that the spirits of LeopardClan leaders keep the willow tree alive, in thanks that it sheltered them." Daisystar meowed. They were laying in a thick bed of moss and reed fluff, smooth pebbles and soft colored shells along the sides of their nest.

"Oh." Dipperflight breathed in the stillness of the den, the dirt hard packed and sturdy.

"Come, go ahead and sit." The old leader meowed, swishing their feathery tail. Their fur was unkempt, not yet washed for the day. Dipperflight figured his own pelt wasn't fairing as well, though, and whispered a thank you as he settled down in a patch of extra moss that was collected across from the leader.

"So...," Daisystar started, green eyes tracing the ragged frame of Dipperflight. "You've been here for only a few days. You're looking a little rough still... has Foxpaw been doing poorly at tending to you? He does get distracted easily, I'm afraid...."

"No, it's.. it's just me." He mumbled, drawing his tail close to himself. The white leader nodded slowly.

"I got like this once. I was a leader then, you were probably a newborn or maybe not even born when it happened.

"I had a mate. She was lovely as a leaf-green day, warm and so alive. Heronmist, her name was." They looked down, as if avoiding eye contact. "She wasn't what I thought she was. She had a son. Told me he was my son...," he looked down at his paws, large and webbed and scarred from seasons of battle and various activities harsh on the extremity. "She lied to me. She left then. I was devastated." Their eyes raised to meet Dipperflight. He didn't know what to say.

"I want more than anything to share what put me here. I'm not sure if I can though. Not just for fear of what will happen to me but... what will happen to others."

"We can protect you, Dipperflight. I was in a horrible place when Heronmist did what she did, I want more than anything to keep you safe and get you away from that darkness. You have so much to offer ThunderClan. I know they aren't my clan, *you* aren't my clan, but you don't deserve what you're going through."

"Fennelstorm would say differently," Dipperflight whispered bitterly.

"Fennelstorm...?" Dipperflight looked up slowly to lock eyes with the aging cat.

"I shouldn't have said anything-- I'm sorry--"

"There's nothing to be sorry about, Dipperflight. But if Fennelstorm caused this to happen to you-- if he *hurt* you," they gestured to the scar just under the tom's eye, "then Oatstar *needs* to know. Not just to protect you but to protect ThunderClan. Fennelstorm is the deputy, and Oatstar is some wild spirit that I wouldn't doubt if she died young-- no offense to ThunderClan but--" Their paws kneed led at the best, tail flicking with anticipation, and he spoke much faster than his usual steady and articulated speech.

"No-- forget I said anything. I just. Forget everything. Please. I don't want him to hurt you too." Daisystar gave a small nod, calming down substantially.

"What did you come here for, then? Perhaps I could help you with that instead." Their eyes still were buzzing with energy.

"I... I woke up," he whispered, shuffling his paws. *I should leave. Go back to my den. Maybe even leave RiverClan in the morning. This whole thing was dumb. Staying in RiverClan was a bad idea.* "I had had a nightmare." He said finally. Daisystar stopped fidgeting, something in the words hitting him. They let out a breath.

"Come," the white leader whispered. Dipperflight stood, settling down outside at the edge of the leader's nest. "It woke you up, you said?" Dipperflight nodded slowly.

"Yeah," he murmured.

"And you came to me...," he shook his head slowly. "I didn't mean to pick you for information. That's not my intention when I invited you in. I'm sorry." Dipperflight nodded slowly. "I seemed to forget that you have feelings. And while there is a darkness at play here back in ThunderClan, there's also you, a victim of that darkness. I should've been more thoughtful of your feelings," they meowed softly. "You know, my son.. well, *Heronmist's* son, he's great at that. Empathy." Their voice was laced with bitterness.

"Maybe he's not your son by blood." Dipperflight's voice was low, "but you let me into this clan. You cared about me. You're great at it too." He offered the words, hoping they were relevant enough to the leader's vague storyline about a lost son. Daisystar gave a side smile, a grizzly, graying, square muzzled side smile.

"Thanks. Stay the night, whatever scared you into the waking world certainly won't meet your dreams tonight, I'll be sure of it." Dipperflight tucked his head down to the edge of the moss nest, the scent of muddy river water washing over him as Daisystar licked the fur between his ears soothingly.

//
Hoi hoi! A lot on Daisystar's past! Sorry if it's all kind of muddled, I have his whole past planned out and I'm not very good at not revealing everything in a revealing chapter. Also surprised I'm too tired to reread this and check for mistakes but it's been forever since I last updated and I'm really pumped to update SO patience is out the window.

Also I met a cat last night, he was so sweet. He was my brother's cat (my brother moved to Indiana to where I'm *originally* from during the summer, so I've never met this cat). He was black and white and guess what his name was.

Sage.

twelve

[image]

"Foxpaw, think fast!" Dipperflight ducked quickly as a moss ball was flashed through the air, the ginger tabby Foxpaw leaping and snatching from the sky without a moment to waste.

"Owlheart, if you're going to play games, please take them where you won't possibly be hitting an unsuspecting warrior." Owlheart waved his tail dismissively as a black and white she-cat chastised him.

"Nonsense, Rookchaser, I'm just training my apprentice to be quick on his paws!" The gray and white tom head-butted the dark furred she-cat.

"No way, if Hazelstream gets hit by a long toss I'll toss you into the river!" Stormcall growled. Dipperflight quietly watched the RiverClan activity around him. He sat in a circle of Stormcall and Hazelstream, as well as now-friendly Breamclaw and the gray and white tabby tom's sister Yarrowfur.

"My passes are always on point! Watch this...!" Owlheart summoned Foxpaw, who brought the moss ball back before dashing out to the middle of camp to receive it. The long-haired, mostly gray with white tom dramatically took a step back before tossing it into the air, swatting it across to Foxpaw, who had gotten distracted by a kit exiting the nursery. "Oh, watch out--!" Owlheart started, fur fluffed up as the soft moss scrap hit into an unsuspecting Sagecloud. The gray tabby's fur fluffed up as he was hit, and looked over his shoulder from where he sat talking with Ravenpaw.

Dipperflight stood, craning his neck to get a better look.

"Ooh. Owlheart, you better be haring it to the river, 'cause Sagecloud'll probably drag you in your sleep to a badger den or something." Stormcall joked from where he lay snugged against his larger counterpart Hazelstream.

"Sagecloud, friend, it was an accident, it's just Foxpaw's always getting a little, um, you know how he is...," Owlheart backed up slowly, laughing nervously. Sagecloud padded toward the tom, blinking slowly and sweetly as he did so, his tail swishing playfully.

"Now, I personally--"

"Newtkit! Sedgecloud, look, Newtkit's out of the nursery!" Foxpaw's squealed. Dipperflight turned his attention from the Owlheart to Foxpaw, who was happily jumping up and down as a young tortoiseshell she-cat watched him with soft yellow-green eyes.

"That's Foxpaw's sister," Hazelstream explained, his long light brown tabby fur damp from the fishing patrol he had just returned from earlier. "She's been pretty sickly, and was too sick when she was supposed to become an apprentice a moon ago." He groomed Stormcall's ear fur.

"Hey, Dipperflight, do you have any siblings back in ThunderClan?" Breamclaw asked brightly, the carcass of a fish discarded a mouse-length from his paws. The dark tabby shook his head.

"No littermates. My mother had had a kit a while before she had me, but they died as an apprentice. Cedarpaw..?" Breamclaw's calico sister nodded quickly.

"Yeah, yeah I remember Oatstar saying they had an apprentice Cedarpaw die at a gathering, like, forever ago!" She chipped in. "Breamclaw and I had just been announced as warriors at the same gathering." She sighed quietly.

"Sorry about Cedarpaw, is what Yarrowfur meant to say," Hazelstream offered condolences quickly. Dipperflight flicked his tail dismissively, his eyes following Sagecloud, Owlheart, Foxpaw, and Newtkit chase each other around.

"Rookchaser is my sister." Stormcall informed, pivoting the conversation to something brighter. "She and Owlheart moon over each other constantly." He rolled his golden eyes dramatically, the black she-cat in question sitting off to the side and watching the

playing group of cats as well.

"Hazelstream's sisters are out on border patrol. I think by Sunningrocks...?" Breamclaw glanced to the large sandy tabby tom, who blinked in agreement.

"Aw, Dipperflight, remember that time I was on patrol with Sagecloud and Hazelstream and you *fell* in the river?!" Stormcall leaped to his paws suddenly, energy pulsing through the small tom.

"I-- Yeah...," Dipperflight's fur grew hot and looked down embarrassed. Yarrowfur gave him a hearty headbutt with a grin.

"Guess this whole stay with RiverClan was meant to be!" The mostly ginger calico meowed, her voice naturally loud. Breamclaw chipped in a bright, devilish smile as well.

"What's all this about?" A tom strode up, pale tawny fur catching the afternoon sun, his legs, face, and tail dark as if they had been splashed in murky water. *I remember him. He's the guy who glared at me the other day. Troutface, I think Foxpaw called him. He's Ravenpaw's mentor!*

"Sorry, I forgot you're anti-ThunderClan-runaway-having-fun. We'll take it down a notch." Yarrowfur gave a lazy grin, flicking her tail casually. Troutface narrowed his pale blue eyes.

"I'm just looking out for the clan." He looked Dipperflight up and down. "Just because he showed up all freaky looking doesn't mean he should be trusted."

"Whatever, Troutface. You just don't see it. He's doing better, too, anyway. Look at the shine in his pelt!" Breamclaw tilted his head in the direction of Dipperflight. The dark tabby blinked, feeling a touch of pride course through his body. Troutface scoffed.

"He was probably just some hungry ThunderClan cat who ran away because Leaf-Bare isn't as nice to forest cats as it is to river cats. Just watch, middle of Leaf-Bare he'll sneak prey out of here and back to--"

"*Troutface.*" A sharp voice interrupted. Dipperflight was frozen, his

eyes wide. The whole clan, relaxed and pleasant moments before, was watching. Sagecloud stood, his pelt ruffled and eyes narrowed, ears pinned back. "*Enough*." The dark pointed tom curled his lip.

"He'll con us out of all of our prey. You can't just trust a cat because they say you should."

"We trusted you because you said we could," Sagecloud shot back. Troutface's fur went on end, and he stalked off, shoving past the gray tabby warrior as he left for the entrance.

The cats looked to each other for a few moments while Sagecloud straightened up, his eyes on the ground. Slowly, the elders and different clusters of warriors started up conversation again, Foxpaw and Owlheart resuming their game with Newtkit. Sagecloud slowly padded toward the Dipperflight and the group he was laying with.

"He's such a thorn to the paw," Yarrowfur growled lowly as Sagecloud plopped down.

"He's just not very trusting," the soft gray tom murmured, his eyes still on the ground, not a hint of pride on his face even though he had just won the argument.

"Er-- thanks." Dipperflight whispered. Sagecloud looked across the small circle of cats to the tabby.

"Yeah. I... I shouldn't have brought up his past, though... I'm such a tadpole..!" The lost looking expression was gone from his face, replaced with the self-tormenting look. The "it's all my fault."

"He was completely out of line." Hazelstream soothed, his pine-green eyes genuine.

"Yes-- but I.. I shouldn't have--" he blinked, taking in a sharp breath, collecting himself, the classic composed Sagecloud replacing the erratic self-doubting one. "It's too late to take it back." He looked square at Dipperflight, a slight apologetic smile. "Are you okay..? I'm sorry about Troutface."

"It's okay." He whispered, looking down to his paws. *It's normal. Being blamed for something I didn't do. I messed this up, I messed that*

up. It's normal.

"I'm due for hunting patrol," Breamclaw announced awkwardly, breaking the moment. He stood, stretching low to the ground before standing straight. "Did you want to come with, Dipperflight? You could come and explore the territory, I'll be a bit busy but I'm sure Sagecloud or Stormcall could tag along to take you on a little tour?" Dipperflight blinked slowly, considering it.

"Tracking my scent all over your territory though... I won't be safe." He shook his head. Stormcall waved his tail.

"Non-sense, just roll in mud or a patch of flowers, nobody will be able to distinguish you from a smelly Breamclaw." The black tom gave a teasing smile to the gray tabby and white warrior, who narrowed his eyes in a playful but challenging manor.

"At least *I* don't smell like a mink dragged through frog-dung, like you," he growled back. Stormcall shot something back, but Dipperflight was distracted by Sagecloud. His soft, pale, ambery-brown eyes were fixed on the earth, his expression lost and void of cheerful grins. The gray tom blinked, catching Dipperflight's gaze, and he gave a bright smile.

The dark tabby couldn't help but feel how fake it was. He opened his mouth to say something quietly, just between them and muffled by Stormcall and Breamclaw's bantering, when a patrol burst through the camp's entrance, Rushfrost at the lead with a tortoiseshell she-cat, light ginger apprentice, and a ginger tabby and white she-cat.

Rushfrost eyes searched camp before landing on Dipperflight.

"Where's Daisystar?!" He called, his fur ruffled and tail high. Hazelstream sat up, green gaze focused on the deputy.

"What's wrong..?" He spoke up.

"ThunderClan at the border. They demand to see Dipperflight."

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SORRY I ACCIDENTALLY PUBLISHED THIS I WAS TRYING TO CLICK ON A NOTIFICATION THAT POPPED UP AND IT DISAPPEARED AND I CLICKED ON PUBLISH INSTEAD SORRY. Wattpad needs to get that feature back where it asks if you're sure you want to publish because that would've saved my life.

Um anyway. Here's chapter twelve. Sorry for typos that you might've stumbled across.

thirteen

[image] [image]

"Dipperflight." The dark tabby in question snapped to attention. A cold sun-high wind gusted across RiverClan camp, ruffling his pelt. The clan's eyes were on him, and Daisystar was before him, the pale golden-ginger and white deputy at the leader's side.

"..yes..?" His voice cracked out, a little over a whisper. Rushfrost had just explained it. ThunderClan hostility at the Sunningrocks border, demanding to for Dipperflight to be released. Saying they'd come claw unsheathed to the camp the next day at sunset if not.

"It's up to you," Daisystar repeated. Dipperflight had zoned out moments earlier, his mind racing. *I won't let any of these cats die at Fennelstorm's claws. Not Foxpaw or Ravenpaw, not Hazelstream or Stormcall, not Rushfrost, not Daisystar, not Sagecloud....* his eyes turned to the gray tabby. The tom's brown gaze was wide and focused on him.

"I'll go. It's... it was so nice of you guys to let me stay with you. To heal. I'm... I'm sorry I ate your prey...," he mumbled, looking to his paws. Stormcall let out a weak laugh which wavered.

"It's okay Dipperflight," Hazelstream meowed gently, the large tom gently stepping from the crowd of gathered cats to rub the side of his face against his black striped shoulder.

"I'll go out with the sunset patrol to tell the ThunderClan that we'll bring you tomorrow at sunhigh, if you'd like." Rushfrost' voice was quiet, his eyes deep in thought. Dipperflight nodded stiffly.

"Yeah... yeah. Thanks, Rushfrost," he croaked in response. The meeting broke up slowly then, cats drifting back to whatever they had been doing, though quieter and with an eye on their guest.

"Dipperflight...," he turned. Foxpaw stood, a few paces away, his

eyes large and ears back. "Are you leaving...?" Dipperflight nervously looked to Sagecloud, who usually was always there to swoop in and help the apprentices when they weren't at their best. The gray tabby was off in the distance, quietly speaking to Stormcall and Hazelstream, the former's golden eyes sharp with an unknown expression.

"I... yeah. I have to." He moved toward the ginger apprentice, sitting down.

"But if you don't want to leave... why leave? We don't want you to leave! Well, maybe Troutface does, but that's only because he doesn't trust anyone." His head tipped to the side as his thought process trailed off.

"Sometimes you have to do what you don't want to," the dark tabby replied softly. Foxpaw thought for a moment before giving a small reluctant nod.

"Yeah," he whispered. The sun settled behind a darkened cloud, casting whispers of light down into the chilled camp. "What was ThunderClan like?" He asked quietly. "I've talked to Ravenpaw about it, theorizing. Probably lots of brambles. I've seen it from the other side of the river, it seems too dark. Scary." He added he last part, raising his brows.

"Oh... it's..." Dipperflight sighed as he thought. "It's nice and cool in greenleaf when it's been too long since it last rained. It shines gold on a sunny leaf-fall day. Leaf-bare is, well.. bare. Snow covers everything and sometimes you don't see the thorn bushes. Dawnwhisker, my friend, she always somehow manages to step on one during the first snowfall of every leaf-bare. She's usually trying to scrounge a vole up when she does though, so Heatherberry never minds plucking them out because she brings actual prey back." He purred quietly. "New-leaf is beautiful." He was silent for a moment.

"You should stick around in RiverClan, you'll get see what it's like here!" Foxpaw chirped. "I don't know what Leaf-Bare is like yet, so we'll get to see it together! Everyone tells me about snow, and the river gets so cold that it becomes solid sometimes. That's why I have to learn to hunt birds. Oh, Dipperflight! You should teach me how

to hunt birds! You hunt birds in ThunderClan, right?" He jumped up with excitement. The dark tabby swished his dark tabby banded tail.

"Maybe," he murmured. Foxpaw circled the white chested tom brightly. *I probably won't be here much longer. By the end of the day tomorrow I'll probably be dead.*

"If you had gotten here in Greenleaf, or even New-Leaf, we could've taught you to swim! If we were to teach you now you'd hate water forever because it's so cold! Sagecloud told me how he taught Troutface to swim back when he was an apprentice and Troutface first came." Dipperflight tipped his head to the side and the young cat stopped in his tracks. "Sagecloud doesn't like when we talk about others, but Troutface was a kittypet." The apprentice shrugged. "Nobody really cares except for Troutface, though."

"Is that why he doesn't like me?" Dipperflight twitched his whiskers, and Focpaw nodded.

"Probably."

"Foxpaw, come look at this fish! Ravenpaw says he caught but I doubt it!" A small black she-cat apprentice called from across the camp, standing next to a defiant looking Ravenpaw and a large carp.

"Oh, WOW!" Foxpaw shouted back, his face bright. He started off before pausing. "See you later, Dipperflight? You won't leave without saying goodbye?" He blinked widely. Dipperflight swallowed before giving a stiff nod.

"I'd never," he murmured. The young tabby purred and sprung away to his peers, the ThunderClan watching him. He turned his gaze to Sagecloud, Hazelstream, and Stormcall, who were staring at him as well. He lowered his head wearily. Hazelstream mouthed something inaudible and Sagecloud waved his tail, beckoning him over. Dipperflight slowly made his way across the island over to the three toms laying in a large patch of flattened sedges, the tall grasses woven tightly for comfort.

"So, you're going back to ThunderClan tomorrow...," Hazelstream sighed, giving a weak smile. Dipperflight blinked, sitting down next to Sagecloud.

"You're not excited." Stormcall notes, golden eyes glittering softly with curiosity. Dipperflight shrugged lightly. He hadn't really told anybody about Fennelstorm, save for Daisystar in a sort of way. *It's for their safety. For my safety.*

"I'm hoping it'll be better when I get back." He admitted vaguely. "But.. knowing... or-- er... possibly, maybe.. it won't be." He looked to his paws, but he looked over quickly as he felt Sagecloud rub the top of his head to just below Dipperflight's jaw.

"You can always come back," he murmured. Dipperflight's fur grew hot slightly, he looked back down as the gray tabby pulled away.

"Yeah, Daisystar accepts you, you're like one of us to them!" Stormcall meowed brightly. Sagecloud blinked awakwardly before flicking his tail tip.

"We'll make sure Troutface isn't a wasp-head if you come back, too. Sorry about him. Rushfrost and I have always made sure he's busy, though, this past half-moon; we kind of knew he was going to be like this...," the gray tom laughed lightly, slightly embarrassed.

"It wasn't a problem, it really was... sort of..." he cut himself off. *Normal. It was normal.* "Yeah." *I'm going to be going back to that. Back to Fennelstorm.* His heart didn't feel any faster, but a dread was growing in his belly. *I feel... sick about it. Like a horrible anxiety. I'm.. scared. I guess. It's a different scared than usual. It's not an intimidating cat scared, it's more of a... worry. What's Fennelstorm going to say or do? What's Dawnwhisker going to think? The other warriors?*

"I should go make Troutface apologize," Stormcall thought out loud.

"Stormcall, it's fine. Honestly." Dipperflight waved his tail slightly, but the small black and white tom was already on his paws.

"Too late, I've already made up my mind. He's out by Daisystar's Den, isn't he? Or is he... he's in the warriors den I think." Stormcall began trotting off across the island toward the reed-woven den was.

"Wait, Stormcall you can't just wake him up to go--!" Hazelstream was on his paws quickly, trotting after his short mate.

Sagecloud purred softly, and Dipperflight shifted so that he was facing just the gray tom. He noticed when he purred, he didn't *just* purr with a smile, he purred with his full face. His eyes closed and head tipped slightly to the side. Sagecloud slowly opened his eyes, amber-brown, sort of like the sky on a foggy dawn.

"I didn't want to ask in front of Hazelstream and Stormcall.. but are *you* ready? I know ThunderClan is ready, and StarClan knows Troutmask is ready, but are you ready to go?" He quirked his head to the side.

"....I'm scared," he finally whispered. Sagecloud thought for a moment.

"I would offer advice, but I can't really think of anything. I don't know what happened. I'd say... not to be afraid but," he looked to the ground as he spoke, but his eyes rose to the dark tabby. "Some things really are scary." Dipperflight have a small nod in slight understanding.

"It's like-- it's like I'm going to be sick. But I know I'm not going to be. It's horrible. Gnawing." He shook his head slowly as he spoke, his eyes closing. He felt Sagecloud press his nose to where his leg met his paw, a gentle, humble gesture, and he opened his eyes.

"My mother left. When I was a kit, she left. She had a huge web of lies, and a cat from another clan knew them. They told them all. My mother disappeared in the middle of the night then. It was a horrible, waking up and calling out for her. Nowhere to be found," the RiverClan tom swallowed, uncomfortable, and took a deep breath. "Five moons later, I'm an apprentice and I go to my first gathering ever. She was there." His muscles tensed, and he dared not meet the eye of Dipperflight. "I called to her, 'Heronmist, Heronmist it's me--' but then I saw it. She was.. expecting another

cat's kits."

Heronmist-- Daisystar said that was the name of their mate.. Sagecloud is the cat they were talking about. The cat who they thought was their son.

"I understand that horrible feeling. It's sick, *horrible* feeling. You can't do anything about it except keep going, it'll be over, you'll get through it. There will be a tomorrow." He took in a deep breath and looked up to the thick-furred Dipperflight. "I swear, Dipperflight, if you're ever not safe, come back."

Dipperflight didn't know what to say. *I can't just... he can't know that I know.*

"I.. yeah. I will. I'm sorry-- I'm sorry about your mom."

"Don't be sorry. There's nothing you could've done about it." The gray tom straightened up, smoothing down a ruffled bit of fur on his chest. "I have a hunting patrol I have to be on. We're leaving pretty soon, but if you need me, I could ask Rookchaser to cover for me." Dipperflight shook his head.

"No, thanks." He smiled softly, and Sagecloud stood, stretching low to the ground, his belly fur brushing the soft earth.

"You should grab something to eat. It's one of your last chances to get to eat a fish..!" He purred, joking. Dipperflight made a face, and Sagecloud bounded away with a laugh to where a small gathering group of cats were preparing to leave. Dipperflight watched him depart, his own thoughts returning.

It's okay to be scared. It's okay to be scared. He thought over and over. *I am. I'm so scared. I don't know what's coming. I don't know if Fennelstorm will be waiting for me, I don't know if he'll be happy or upset or angry. I don't know if my clan knows about what he did.*

I don't want to leave these cats. But I have to.

//

AN
I hard-core slipped and fell in the school parking lot today and ripped a hole in the knee of my khakis I'm so mad I really liked this pair. Maybe if I get blood poisoning, though, I won't have to go to school on Monday. That would be nice.

Sorry for the info dump I had to get it out because it's now or never. Better planning was needed on the character history aspects of writing. Also every other part of writing.

fourteen

[image]

The sky was grayed, the masses clouds thick and heavy with water. The smell of rain overwhelmed the scent of fish that always hung around the RiverClan territory. Dipperflight took a cautious step out of the reed walls of camp, the entrance being the slim gap in the thick reed wall. Rushfrost was wading through the stream that stretched around the island camp, leading the way through the narrow sandbar. This was the first time he had set paw out into the territories in a half-moon, the last time being when he had escaped ThunderClan. *And now I'm going back.*

"Dipperflight, you okay? The water should only be a little bit chilly." Sagecloud was just behind him, along with Rookchaser, Breamclaw, and Stormcall. Rushfrost didn't say it, but Dipperflight knew why he chose the cats that he did. Sagecloud was chosen to calm any heating situations, and the others were some of the most skilled fighters in the clan. *Sagecloud isn't a good fighter though. I'll need to be sure to keep the tension low, too, then.*

"Yeah, I'm fine," he replied, stepping into the shallow water. It was bone-chilling cold, like small icy thorns. He sucked in a breath of air, pushing through the heavy water to the other side, a freezing wind battering at his wet legs. Rushfrost welcomed him with a soft smile.

"It isn't too far of a trek from here to Sunningrocks. Hopefully we make it before it starts raining, that was you aren't sopping wet by the time you get back--" he stopped himself. Get back to ThunderClan. That's what he was going to say. "It was great to have you around, Dipperflight." The deputy murmured, turning and setting off again as Breamclaw, leading up the back of the patrol, crossed the river.

The walk was mostly quiet, nobody daring to say anything. The silence was threatened only as the rain started to drizzle, hitting the travelers softly but with a cold shock. Dipperflight didn't want to

think. His mind was blank, the only solid thing running through was Sagecloud walked close enough to him that he could feel the warmth and softness, while at the same time not quite touching.

"Almost there...," Stormcall whispered from just behind him. Dipperflight swallowed. *I'll get to see Dawnwhisker and Lionfur and her kits. I'll see old faces, I'll be in the forest. The fresh-kill will be squirrels and blackbirds, not fish. Fennelstorm will be there.* He blinked. *Sagecloud won't be there. Foxpaw won't be there. Stormcall, Hazelstream, Daisystar, Rushfrost, Breamclaw, Ravenpaw... all of these cats I've befriended won't be there. In RiverClan I have friends and support and love. In ThunderClan... I have Fennelstorm. I have... nothing. I have* him *deciding my actions, my meals, my friends. I have his love, that cold, expressionless love. I don't want to leave.... but sometimes we have do things that we don't want to do.*

"Hey, can you tell who they are from here?" Rookchaser asked. She had a lower voice, full of self-control and a hint of stress, but with her brother Stormcall at her side it was all understandable.

"Hm...?" Dipperflight looked over to her.

"ThunderClan. Can you tell who's who from here?" Dipperflight looked out across the field they were trekking through. The river, rushing with anger at the rain was visible, Sunningrocks seeming icy cold in the grayness of the day. The shapes of four cats were slightly visible, taking cover against the large stones. He shook his head.

"Too dark," he replied.

"You're going to have to swim through the river, but we'll all be helping you across," Rushfrost announced from a tail-length ahead.

"Hey Dipperflight, remember that time we had to pull you out of the river..?!" Stormcall purred, his eyes bright, golden and eerie in the darkness.

"How could you ever let him forget...," Sagecloud murmured, though his eyes were glittering with warmth at the sarcasm.

"I'm just saying, this is totally going to be the ultimate case of déjà vu." The black and white tom laughed.

Dipperflight smiled lightly, and he felt Stormcall give him a gentle nudge.

"You know we're going to miss you, right?" Stormcall purred, rain dripping off his whiskers and rolling off his thick, water repellent fur. Dipperflight didn't reply, just kept looking ahead. *The feeling is mutual.*

"Alright, it's going to be a pretty cold and little rough, but it's not too far of a swim," Rushfrost murmured. The cats grouped together tightly. The deputy gently brushed his tail across the dark tabby's shoulder blade, his eyes soft. "Let's go." Th golden and white tabby tom dove into the water, and Dipperflight followed suit, Sagecloud pressed to his left side and Stormcall to his right, Breamclaw and Rookchaser swimming strongly just behind him. The water was icy, rain pelting it's surface and sprinkling icy drops back onto him. It was over quickly though, Rushfrost pulling him up out of the water, Sagecloud and Stormcall helping him up as well.

They were pushed out of the way though as a cat leaped onto Dipperflight, pushing him to the wet, muddy earth. His fur spiked on end, but it flattened as he realized who it was. Yellow eyes bright and tabby calico fur on end with excitement.

"Dipperflight! I was so worried, I had no idea where you went!" Dawnwhisker purred loudly.

"Dawnwhisker--!" Was all he could think to say.

"And are these the cats that took you..?!" She growled, her eyes narrowing as she glared the cats down. Sagecloud took a step forward, his face soft, tail waving gently.

"No, no, it's not what you think--" he started.

"It's alright, Dawnwhisker, at least we've got our Dipperflight back." The dark brown tabby's eyes widened, his heart racing as a ginger tabby padded from the cover of the rocks. His yellow-green

eyes were soft. "No need to think about what RiverClan did in the past, just think about how they've graciously returned our clanmate now." He rubbed his face against Dipperflight's soakin wet cheek, but Dipperflight was frozen, and not from the cold. He couldn't move. He couldn't bring himself to. *Fennelstorm is here Fennelstorm is touching me Fennelstorm isn't killing anybody Fennelstorm is here--*

"Come on, we need to get back to camp. The rain is getting pretty bad." Dipperflight recognized the voice, Stonevine, who meowed from where she still was sheltering.

"Can't we say goodbye--" He heard Stormcall whisper to Sagecloud as he was ushered away.

"I--" Was the only replied he could make out. He turned to look back as he was pulled into the treeline, Dawnwhisker talking brightly about what had happened in the past half-moon. Rain poured down, and the RiverClan patrol still stood frozen in place. Sagecloud's eyes were round, and Dipperflight knew more than anything that they were rounded with a faked happiness, masking something deeper.

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AN
I found my keyboard and it has given me the ability to type much much faster. I love this story so much too bad there's only like... one or two chapters left.

Also yeah warrior cats MIGHT not know the word Déjà vu but they probably have a cat word for it, so for our human purposes it's called Déjà vu.

fifteen

[image]

"I had a dream last night it was New-Leaf, you know? I actually woke up this morning thinking there were leaves on trees and actual warmth. Little did I know that it snowed during the night and the river is actually *frozen* over." Dawnwhisker picked her way through the layer of snow that coated the forest floor, Dipperflight just behind her.

"Could be because you were practically sleeping on top of me...," he muttered, receiving a tail flick to the nose.

"Don't blame me, it's cold. Ugh, I don't know why Fennelstorm sent out a hunting patrol, it's not like a mouse is going to come out and eat-- hey, wait, just kidding, I think I smell a chaffinch, wait right here..!" She lowed to the ground, stalking off, her paws lightly crunching on the snow. Dipperflight watched her leave, and he sat down, wrapping his tail around his paws.

The river is frozen... I wonder how they're doing. It had been two moons. He had tried not to think about it. About Sagecloud, Foxpaw, Daisystar, any of them. He tried to focus on what was going on in the moment, Fennelstorm had told him that was the best thing to do. Forget the past, think about the present. It had been good, too. Fennelstorm hadn't brought anything up from the before, he hadn't been really scary. He had been kind, a little protective here and there but it wasn't *too* bad. Dipperflight had even gone to his first gathering since he and Fennelstorm had first been together. Sagecloud wasn't there.

"Got it!" Dawnwhisker purred as she tramped back, a diluted red, gray, and black bird in her jaws. "If it were New-Leaf, this bird would be *waaay* fatter. It'll still make Plumkit and Cypresskit happy, though. Speaking of them, I'm tired of Cypresskit complaining that she's hungry, she actually gets a guaranteed meal just about every time prey is brought back." Dawnwhisker complained.

"They'll be apprentices really soon though." Dipperflight noted as they continued on through the snow. Dawnwhisker nodded dramatically.

"Thank *StarClan*. For the past three dawn patrols I've gotten back, from they've successfully woken me up when I'm napping. I just want to keep dreaming about it being New-Leaf, but instead I get to wake up to them fighting about who's the mouse and who's the hunter." She huffed, her tail flicking behind her. "Anyway, gathering tonight. I pray to STARCLAN I get chosen, the last thing I want is to be stuck in a freezing camp with the kits."

"I'm going to ask Fennelstorm if he'll ask Oatstar to bring me."

"I wish I had an in with the deputy. I have an in with the deputy's mate though, that's pretty close, right?" She gave the dark tabby a playful nudge, one of the bird's feathers tickling Dipperflight's shoulder.

"I can ask him for you, too," he purred, and she jumped on her toes with excitement.

"Awesome! I've been talking with Stormcall recently about catching birds. He says his sister is expecting kits so he wants to be able to help be a good brother. I'm so glad I don't have siblings that seems like such a chore."

"Wait Stormcall, as in Stormcall from RiverClan?" Dawnwhisker tipped her head to the side slightly before nodding.

"Was he one of your kidnappers? He seemed so nice, though...." Dipperflight hadn't actually told anyone what had happened in RiverClan. That would've meant he would have had to tell what led him to go in the first place, and Fennelstorm had been so great since he returned. Sweet, funny, and affectionate. Nothing like before. To come forward now... it would be too late. *He's changed. He's better now.*

"No, no, Stormcall's really cool. His sister is Rookchaser, right?" Dawnwhisker nodded eagerly.

"Yeah, that was her name. He's pretty funny, and his mate is so nice, they're honestly goooals. Next to you and Fennelstorm, of course." The enterence to camp blended even better now that everything was coated in a layer of white, the bright ginger tabby Sorrelleap sitting guard was the only thing giving away the gorse tunnel's location.

"Good hunting! Nice chaffinch, Dawnwhisker." Sorrelleap purred, and the calico tabby purred awkwardly, ducking her head with embarrassment.

"Ah--thanks...," she waved her tail as if brushing off the compliment, and the pair padded into camp, a clump of snow falling off the tunnel's leaves and onto Dipperflight's shoulder. He let out a small yelp from the sudden chill, shaking his pelt out as Dawnwhisker laughed brightly.

"Dipperflight! Did you want to go to the gathering tonight? I'm sure Daisystar will be completely shocked yet again that you're strong and resilient even after being taken by his clan." Oatstar was sitting under the High Rock, and greeting them as soon as they set paw into the open, slow layered glade. The she-cat only ever stuck around in camp when it was snowy out. Her body buzzed with unused energy, her tail tip flicking back and forth as she spoke. Dipperflight nodded quickly.

"Yeah-- that'd be great-" the golden brown tabby leader grinned, leaping to her paws.

"Fantastic. I can't wait to rub it in Daisystar's face, that old badger!" She laughed. "I've gotta go talk to Heatherberry, but you're totally in for going tonight." Dawnwhisker glanced over to Dipperflight, a pleading look on her face.

"Oh-- er- can Dawnwhisker come, too?"

"Sure!" Oatstar called over her shoulder, entering the stone medicine den.

Dawnwhisker silently let out a cheerful yowl, bouncing on her paws. Dipperflight smiled lightly, and was about to head to the

meager fresh-kill pile with the caliby when he heard his name be called.

"Dipperflight, come sit with me," Fennelstorm called, laying in a patch of sun. Dipperflight glanced over to Dawnwhisker before nodding, padding to his mate.

"Yes?" Dipperflight murmured, sitting down next to the ginger tabby.

"How was your outing?" The tom asked, eyes half closed as he groomed his own pelt.

"It was nice, I guess. A little cold, but it's Leaf-Bare." He shrugged. Fennelstorm purred.

"Aren't you so glad you have a mate that lets you go on hunting patrols?" A purr rumbled out of his throat and Dipperflight settled down with his paws tucked under himself.

"Yeah. Tomorrow I think I want to go to the river, I heard it's frozen--"

"The river? Why would you ever want to go there-- RiverClan might go and grab you again." Fennelstorm looked up through half-closed eyes, a sort of a threatening look glimmering in them. *He knows why I left.*

"Oh.. I guess whatever you send me on will be just as good, then..." he offered, and Fennelstorm nodded.

"Owl Tree is what I was thinking, you and Rosefoot. I think I'll ask Oatstar for Plumkit as an apprentice, you could help me train her, too." Dipperflight's eyes lit up.

"Oh-- really? That would be awesome!"

"Yeah. I've noticed she's a little quiet, but she seems pretty smart." Dipperflight nodded enthusiastically. "If you start acting like you did before, though, I won't let her within a tree-length of you." Fennelstorm warned, and Dipperflight nodded.

"Yeah, yeah, this will be great. She's an apprentice next moon, too, right?"

Dipperflight's breathe billowed out in a cloud, crisp night air biting at his pelt. The full moon's light shone down in the Gathering hollow, outlining the bare, snow covered four trees. Oatstar and ShadowClan's leader Chervilstar dusted snow off the Great Rock. The two clans had arrived at the same time, and had walked the final stretch to the Hollow together.

"Hey, that's the elder from ShadowClan, he's got some sick stories about tons of romantic affairs back in 'his day.' I'm going to go talk to him, wanna come?" Dawnwhisker looked to Dipperflight.

"Mm..," a cold wind gusted through the hollow, bringing with it the scent of fish. "Maybe later?" Dawnwhisker quirked a smile and nodded.

"Yeah, he'd probably think your cute and try to hit on you," she teaser, bounding off before he could give her a flick of his tail. He looked ahead to where Fennelstorm was conversing with ShadowClan's deputy, Hornetwing, before glancing back up out of the hollow to where RiverClan was padding in at a leisurely pace. His heart quickened as he saw them... Foxpaw was trotting happily by Ravenpaw, and his sister Newtkit was now Newtpaw and at his other side. Stormcall was with Troutface, Hazelstream, and Yarrowfur, Breamclaw close behind them. Daisystar was right behind the ground of apprentices, Rushfrost and the medicine cat Wrenleaf in a bright conversation.

His heart beat even faster when padding slowly next to a tortoiseshell and white she-cat, Sagecloud came into sight. His pale gray tabby fur was silvery in the moonlight, his smile bright and brown eyes warmer than a Green-Leaf morning. Dipperflight blinked, looking out across to Fennelstorm, closing his eyes.

I never got to say goodbye. I haven't even seen him since-- I can still see his face... He looked back to the RiverClan tom, their long fur gently buffeted by the leaf-bare winds.

"Dipperflight, hey, you weren't here at the last gathering!" Foxpaw bounded forward, yellow-green eyes bright. Kit fluff no longer lined his ears, and his fur was getting to have the long thickness of a full grown RiverClan warrior. He was still short and full of energy, which made Dipperflight purr to himself.

"Yeah, I stayed behind, Fennelstorm didn't want me to come since it was snowing." Foxpaw rolled his eyes.

"That's lame. You missed it, Newtpaw was announced as an apprentice! Sagecloud is her mentor, it's so cool because now he'll actually get to go to all of our training sessions as an actual mentor!"

"Foxpaw, come here I want you to meet someone!" A queen called, and both of the toms looked up to see who had called. While Foxpaw met the face of his mom, Dipperflight locked eyes with Sagecloud. The gray tabby tom seemed a bit shocked, but he could see a brightness beginning to radiate from him, and his feathery tail waived him over.

Without hesitation, the thickly striped tom strode over, head and tail high with excitement, not even looking up as WindClan also arrived in the Hollow.

"Sagecloud..!" He breathed the name out as he neared.

"Dipperflight," the RiverClan tom purred.

"You weren't here at the gathering two moons ago." Sagecloud nodded.

"Yeah, I had stayed behind to patch a hole in the queen's den, Owlheart was freaking out about Rookchaser staying there, and she was ready to cuff him. You look pretty good, Dipper!" The dark tom ducked his head with embarrassment.

"No I don't, prey doesn't run very well in ThunderClan during Leaf-Bare." Sagecloud laughed lightly.

"That's not what I meant, you look happier. Besides, you've got too much fur to be able to tell that you're getting proper meals. The

river is frozen for us, so we're not doing as good as usual either," he sighed, and Dipperflight could see weariness in his eyes. His pelt wasn't as glossy as it had been, and overall composure was more subdued than usual.

"That's too bad." The ThunderClan tabby murmured. Sagecloud brushed it off with a flick of his tail, but caught the eye of another cat.

"Ah, hang on just a moment, I think someone wants me...," he meowed, distractedly. Dipperflight nodded quickly, and soon was occupied by Stormcall cheerfully giving him a prod.

"Hey, it's about to begin I think, come sit with us!" The black and white tom motioned toward Dawnwhisker, Hazelstream, and a WindClan she-cat.

"Let the Gathering begin!" WindClan's leader, a light brown patched she-cat called out.

"Would you like to start, Chervilstar?" Dipperflight heard the leathe she-cat ask, but ShadowClan's leader shook her head.

"It's all you, Mottledstar." The long legged leader dipped her head, standing among the other three sitting leaders on the Great Rock.

"Very well. WindClan has faired well this past moon, Sedgechaser has been made a warrior." Dipperflight murmured the new warrior's name along with the rest of chants of "Sedgechaser, Sedgechaser" and a sleek brown tabby she-cat stood with her chest puffed out. Mottledstar swished her thin tail as the cheers died down. "That's all."

"ShadowClan is doing well, as one would expect," Chervilstar flashed a charming smile, her blue eyes gleaming, and Dipperflight noticed Oatstar roll her eyes dramatically. "A rogue has joined our clan, Muntjacfang." Oatstar's eyes lit up.

"Wait, what?" She gaped, slightly startled.

"What, did you not hear me? A rogue joined ShadowClan. He's not a rogue anymore, we don't give warrior names to non-clan cats."

Chervilstar tipped her head up challengingly, and Dipperflight felt Stormcall lurch forward.

"Chervilstar always gets like this, one of these days she's going to cause something bad to happen...," Hazelstream whispered. Oatstar's fur lifted slightly.

"That's not what I mean. You let a rogue join your clan?" The pale brown tabby leader's tail swished back and forth behind her, her typical restlessness returning.

"Oatstar, it's none of our business what ShadowClan chooses to do outsiders. If they have a mutiny, it's none of our business." Mottledstar meowed simply, shrugging.

"I'm more worried about my own Clan. He's not a warrior, he doesn't know the warrior code like we do. If my warriors die because ShadowClan let in some.. some *Muntjacfang*--" Daisystar let out a soft chuff of laughter, interrupting her rant.

"You two done, now?" They tipped their long-furred head to the side. Oatstar scoffed, flicking an ear, and Chervilstar sniffed, her head still high.

"RiverClan is doing well. The river has frozen over, mostly only by the ThunderClan border, but the land still provides us with plenty of prey." Dipperflight heard Stormcall laugh softly.

"Hunting birds is one of the most awkward thing to do though, he didn't mention that. I don't know how you do it, Dipperflight. I have a new respect for bird-hunting clans." The black and white tom murmured, and the ThunderClan warrior flicked his tail in reply, not wanting to speak and be glared at by other intently-listening cats.

"ThunderClan is doing perfect." Oatstar meowed coldly, her amber gaze sharp. Daisystar raised a brow awkward, as they were sitting between the two silently feuding leaders.

"I.. think that concludes the gathering..?" Mottledstar offered, and Oatstar leaped down gracefully from the Great Rock without

another word.

"ThunderClan, let's go!" She snapped, already heading out of the hollow, her warriors tailing after her with confused faces.

Dipperflight quickly bid a goodbye to Stormcall and Hazelstream, but as he pushed through the crowd of cats he was stopped by a wide-eyed Sagecloud.

"Dipperflight, I need to talk to you...," he meowed in a hurry.

"I have to go, my Clan is leaving, is it quick?" Sagecloud shook his head, his eyes darting around anxiously.

"I.. meet me tomorrow night at Sunningrocks? I *really* need to talk to you. Please." The dark tom could hear his name be called by Fennelstorm.

"Dipperflight! Come on, let's go, where are you?"

"Please, Dipperflight..!" The gray tabby begged. The long-haired ThunderClan warrior blinked slowly, nodding.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'll be there." He turned, bounding off to where Fennelstorm was waiting, his tail flicking impatiently.

"Who was that?" The ginger tabby growled as the pair padded to catch up with their clanmates. Dipperflight looked ahead.

"It.. it was nobody."

//
AN

MMMmm watcha sayyyyyayyyayyyy. This isn't going to be cliché I swear. Or at least I don't think it's cliché... don't lose hope now, guys, we're almost done.

sixteen

[image] [image]

Darkness shrouded the ThunderClan camp. Snow still clung to the earth, the top layer glazed over with an icy sheet. Dipperflight shifted, making sure that when he stood he wouldn't wake any of his denmates, cringing at the sound of his moss rustle. He glanced to Dawnwhisker, who was snuggled deep in her moss, half of which she had stolen from his own nest, her patched tabby tail draped over a snoring black and white tom on her other side. His gaze swept over to Fennelstorm, who was sleeping at his other side, a few mouse lengths separating them. Dipperflight breathed in. *Now or never. You can't keep waiting for the perfect moment, now's good enough.*

Standing stiffly, he quickly checked the cats next to him. Not a single cat stirred. Quietly, with as little sound as he could, he left the den, amber eyes carefully glancing back to make sure all were still asleep. He blinked once, glancing down to his paws before looking back up with determination. Sagecloud had been anxious, he had been spooked. Something had been troubling him, so much that it had broken through the cheerful mask. He set off, paws not even breaking the surface on the thin layer of white that coated ThunderClan's camp.

What could possibly perturb him so much though? Dipperflight's thoughts were muddled, like the sloshy snow by the Thunderpath. His paws deftly led him through the dense, leafless forest toward where he knew the river was.

The scent of river hit him far before the sound of water, which he knew was mostly attributed to the iced over river. The forest line broke quickly, just like it always did, opening to the completely open and shadowless border, the moonlight free to pour out and shine down on the snow. It was perfectly bright and clear enough to make out the stark gray rocks covered in a dusting, the river glassy and still. Sitting at the edge of the water, back to him, was

Sagecloud. His head was low, fur straightened and glistening. He turned though, eyes round as he scented the ThunderClan warrior, softening.

"Dipperflight-- I was worried someone else was going to arrive in your place-- I should've waited on the other side of the river until you came--"

"It's fine, it's okay." Dipperflight meowed gently, padding forward, meeting the gray tabby half-way.

"I'm sorry for all the secrecy and making you sneak out. It's just...," he looked up to the sky, the starlight reflecting in his pupils. "I'm so scared. I don't know what to do...!" It came out as a half-sob, his eyes shutting, and he hung his head in shame before picking it back up with a sudden strength.

"Can I help you at all? What can I do?" Dipperflight craned his long, thick furred neck forward earnestly. Sagecloud gave a small smile.

"My mother. Heronmist. I didn't tell you the whole story.... She was around for a moon or two before leaving. She lied. A lot. She told everyone that Daisystar was my father. Told Daisystar they were my father. They.. they loved me," he glanced away sadly. "And then right after a gathering when cats were conversing before we left, a ShadowClan tom came out and told Daisystar that Heronmist was a liar. My real dad.. it's that guy. From ShadowClan. He told everyone. And then Heronmist left the next day. She left me. Daisystar didn't want to be my dad anymore." Dipperflight lowed his head, gently pressing his muzzle to the side of Sagecloud's face.

"Sagecloud, I'm so, so sorry." Dipperflight whispered. The RiverClan tom nodded slightly, his body lightly trembling.

"I had to tell you. I need to know what I should do. My mom asked me at the gathering last night if.. if she could come back to RiverClan. She doesn't want to come back unless she has my approval." Dipperflight blinked in thought.

"I... I'm not the right cat to ask... Maybe Hazelstream--"

"No. Nobody in my clan can know, not until she's sure she can come back. You're smart." Sagecloud looked up desperately. "Please.. what do I do? I want to be angry, I want to say no-- but I shouldn't be angry, I know I should be kind and forgive her-- but I... I don't know if that's what I should do. She had other kits, a whole other family!" He had starting thinking out loud, unfiltered. A raw Sagecloud.

"I'm.. I'm not smart though. I... I've been allowing something bad to happen for moons and moons without realizing it. I let it go on, but deep down I *knew* it was bad. But I didn't... I don't know. Didn't want to be alone. Being in RiverClan taught me I wasn't alone, that so many cats love me. But I came back to ThunderClan I let.... I can't make this decision for you, Sagecloud. I'm sorry. Do...," he thought a moment. "Do what you think is the right thing to do. Follow your heart." The dilute tom nodded in defeat, his weight suddenly falling into Dipperflight's chest as he pressed close. He shut his eyes, welcoming the embrace of sorts, his senses filled with his scent, which was something akin to sweet frost covered sedges and old flowers from Green-Leaf.

"Thank yo--"

"Who's this." Dipperflight's eyes snapped open, and he pushed away from Sagecloud as he flipped around to see Fennelstorm. The deputy's fur was on end, eyes narrowed with a ferocity Dipperflight could remember well.

"It's not what you think." Sagecloud took a step forward, but Dipperflight was frozen.

"I think it *is* what I think. Dipperflight, were you... are you cheating on me?!" He blazed, and Dipperflight crouched to the snow. Sagecloud noticed this immediately, his body shifting in front of the large dark tabby.

"Get back." He meowed firmly.

"You probably don't know this, but I don't take orders from fish-faced nobodies. Go back to where you came from, you shrimp." Fennelstorm growled, his eyes locked onto Dipperflight like a

hunter seeing a mouse. "This is between Dipperflight and I." He flexed his claws, stalking forward, and Sagecloud tensed.

"I won't let you hurt him!" The dilute tabby growled. Fennelstorm scoffed before pouncing foreword, claws unsheathed, hooking into Sagecloud and sending them tumbling away from Dipperflight, who stood frozen in shock like the iced over river fox-lengths away. His amber eyes widened. *No. Sagecloud-- he said he can't fight well...! No, no no nononononono.*

Sagecloud was pinned down, belly exposed as Fennelstorm pushed his claws into him, red streaked across the pure white snow leading to the clashing toms. The ginger tabby's claw raised, Sagecloud pushed his hind legs into his stomach. the strike clipping his soft-skinned foreleg, and the grey tom let out a quiet hiss in pain as he pushed Fennelstorm off with a powerful kick, sending him skittering in the snow with a claw-hold on the smaller furrier tom. Dipperflight tensed, his eyes wide as he watched it happen. Fennelstorm got the upper paw again. He pressed Sagecloud's face into the snow, and the gray tabby weakly kicked out his hind legs to try and free himself under the much heavier weight.

"Dipperflight, run!" Sagecloud choked out, his feathery tail flicking behind him as he struggled.

"No, Dipperflight, stay!" Fennelstorm meowed, his voice slightly sing-songy. "Stay and watch what happens when you try to leave me, do something I don't tell you to do, or go against me in any way. Where should I hurt him next, Dipperflight? Nick his ears? Scar his pretty little muzzle? Blind him? What would hurt you, a useless, worthless--" Dipperflight sprung forward, barreling into the ginger tabby. Sagecloud fell to his side at the release of the weight, his breath fogging out as he panted for air. Dipperflight didn't even realize it what had happened until he released the deputy from his grip, the two tumbling separately right into the iced over river.

The brown tabby immediately tried scrambling to his paws, the surface slippery, trying to pull him back down. He looked across the glassy surface to where Fennelstorm had fallen, hard, on the ice a few fox lengths away and a mouselength from the shore.

It was quiet then, the air filled with panting. Fennelstorm looked up, dazed, before blinking strongly and opening his mouth to speak when a sharp sound snapped through the air. A splay of cracks slowly spread out around the deputy like a spider's web. It only took him a moment before scrambling back quickly to the muddy river-side a bound away from where he had fallen, but Dipperflight's eyes widened as he realized he was much further out. Sagecloud was weakly trying to stand, blood marring his shoulder and various undecipherable cuts due to his thick fur, his head swinging to look as he heard the sickening groan erupt from the ice.

"Dipperflight, RUN!" Sagecloud yelped out, pelt on end. His breath caught in his throat as he began to slide towards the ThunderClan border, which was quickly splitting open. His paws flew out under him as he tried to pushed toward it, and he quickly got to his paws as he slid across the slick ice which was braking open right out from under his paws. His eyes met Fennelstorm's, the amber gaze wide and pleading. *Help me. Please.* The ginger tom turned.

And left.

Quietly, without word, into the night, away from Sagecloud, and not in the direction of the heart of ThunderClan's territory. Dipperflight breath quickened, and as the ice shattered and split apart under him he leapt with as much force as he could summon from the slippery surface, shutting his eyes. He felt an icy cold wash over his body, but then he felt the strong clamp of jaws of his scruff, and blinked open his eyes to see Sagecloud grasping his scruff, only his back paws on the shore, his small front paws churning at the water to keep them afloat. Carefully, he pulled the dark tabby through the water's icy currant, to the snowy riverside, flopping into the snow, his entire front half soaking wet.

Dipperflight panted for air, setting to drying both of their fur before it froze, careful around the cuts on his soft skin.

"I'm so, so, so sorry...," he whispered as he dried Sagecloud's fur. "This is all my fault. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. Sorry, sorry, sorry...." The white-chested tom repeated, shutting his eyes and pressing his face into his long gray chest fur.

"It's okay, Dipperflight." Sagecloud whispered, blinking those soft, warm, pale brown-amber eyes open. "I think... I think it's over. It's over now. It's alright."

***

The sun was bright, Dipperflight hummed softly as he watched Sagecloud playfully pounce to the ground, Lavenderkit and Salmonkit laughing brightly, jumping on him to try and bring him to the ground.

"Dipperflight, please tell me about ThunderClan again! I want to know what it's like for when I'm leader, I'll know all of their secrets!" Aspenkit purred as she sat next to Dipperflight, also watching her siblings and father play.

"You know I can't tell secrets about it with you guys, I promised I'd keep ThunderClan's secrets secret." Aspenkit pouted.

"C'mon, please dad? Please, anything, tell me anything!" She begged, pushing him lightly with her white forepaws green eyes eager.

"The trees turn colors in Leaf-Fall. The whole territory is oak trees and birch trees, and it's all orange, red, and yellow in Leaf-Fall. The entire forest." Aspenkit tipped her head up, as the gray-and-white she-kit had never personally lived through a Leaf-Fall due to her birth in the middle of Leaf-Bare to Rookchaser. "The leaves turn a bright color, and then they fall off the trees for Leaf-Bare. Then in New-Leaf..." he waved his tail.

The sky was bright, clouds lazily drifting loosely through the blueness. The sun was warm, keeping everything alive. The sedges were flowering, and the reeds weren't as dull as they were in the colder moon. Red-Winged Blackbirds swooped through the sweet aired sky, the smell of fish and river-mud faint but comfortingly there. The river was giggling just behind the reed walls of the RiverClan camp, the water still holding the lingering tepidness of Leaf-Bare, was by Sun-High it usually was nice and warm.

"Everything can grow again, become new again." Aspenkit

brushed her her head against Dipperflight's cheek, laughing brightly.

"I'll be an apprentice when it comes time for that!" She realized out loud, an excited gleam in her eyes. Dipperflight thought carefully before nodding, making her bounce on her paws with happiness. "I'm gonna go ask Foxlight if he'll play with me!"

"What's wrong with Sagecloud's games?" Dipperflight asked as she started off. Her small, kit fluff covered tail flicked sassily.

"He only plays kit-games with Lavenderkit and Salmonkit. Foxlight plays Ultimate Mossball with me." Dipperflight raised a brow, but she bounded off before he could ask anymore questions on the validity and safety of the game.

"Dipperflight!" He looked up as the gray tabby who played "kit-games" padded up, his brown eyes bright.

"Sagecloud," he purred, sitting up and licking his ear-tip. Sagecloud huffed out a laugh, giving him a playful nudge.

"Lavenderkit and Salmonkit went to the Elder's Den for stories. So? Ready for another swimming lesson?" He arched a brow, and Dipperflight nodded, eyes shut.

"Yeah. I'm doing way better now that the water is warmer!"

"Sure, sure, you still flail around like that time I saved you from the river the first time." Sagecloud led the way out of camp, the river awaiting them.

"You and Stormcall, always bringing that up...!" Dipperflight sighed, looking out into the water.

"If you want, I can bring up the other numerous times I've saved your tail from drowning...." Dipperflight waded in, rolling his eyes.

"That was low..."

"Really..? I'm sorry--"

"Not as low as this, though!" Dipperflight swatted his paw at the water's surface, splashing water at the RiverClan tom, who let out a yelp of shock.

"You really are getting better-- but not as good as me!" He dove in, sending up a splash from his form entering the body of water.

"Hey, no fair, you know I can't swim under water nearly well enough!" The dark tabby laughed.

"Let's work on that, then." Sagecloud reemerged, water streaking down his fur.

"Or we could just..." Dipperflight started purring, "go with the *flow*. Get it, because it's water?" Sagecloud let out a laugh, splashing him gently.

"Not as good as the fish joke from last night." He remarked, but Dipperflight narrowed his eyes.

"Hm. Which fish joke? I carp seem to remember...."

"Too far."

"Really?"

"No way, keep going, tell another!"

AN//

Obviously I couldn't stop writing at the end there I couldn't find a place to stop. BUT ALAS. After three months, I've finally finished. It has been a struggle. For instance, wattpad crashed as I was writing the climax in this chapter and I loST THE ENTIRE CLIMAX I'm still salty. I've still got my final authors note though so, I guess stay tuned for that but it's not that big of a deal if you peace out now. If you do, bye bud! It was nice having you, thank you so much for reading.

Also all of Dipperflight's jokes at the end I most definitely DID COME UP WITH ON THE SPOT they were all my jokes I thought of ahaaaaaaaaa someone laugh at my jokes please i swear I'm funny.

If anyone is curious about Sagecloud and Dipperflight's children, they're actually Rookchaser and Owlheart's kits. Rookchaser didn't want to be a mom, so she and owl actually separated now because Owlheart was so upset that she didn't want to be a mother to their kits. I didn't want to put something a little upsetting in a happy ending though. I actually did think about making Dipperflight or Sagecloud die in the entire Fennel scene but I could never do that to myself or you guys lol. It wouldn't have really contributed to anything except being able to tag it with Major Character Death either.
ALSO LOOK AT THIS GIF IT'S TOTALLY A SHORT FURRED FOXPAW/LIGHT IM LAUGHING LOLLLL

I found a longer one too of this cat on ice but wattpad wouldn't let me upload it since it's "over 3mb," how lame.

end

ALRIGHT IT'S OVER.

Thank you so much for bearing with the slow updates. Remember when this was supposed to be a NaNoWriMo? It's literally the end of January lol. I don't really like specifically saying a few people who "meant a lot" in writing the book because all of you mean a lot when I was writing this. ChronaLilly tho because she helped me with a lOT of stuff and she's also writing her own warriors fanfic right now that's pre t t y freakin good. Seriously though all of you meant a whole lot, all of your comments with support and love and just ah. It helps me to finish stuff. Thank you for existing, thank you for reading. So not just @ Chrona, but also @ all of you who commented/voted/read/cared. You mean the world to me.

ANYWAY I do need to know what you guys think I should work on next!!

SOUND AND COLOR
A warriors fanfic (obviously because that's like... all I do ahaha) following an ebony long haired oriental she-cat named Ravenwhisker and a lynx point domestic shorthair named Shellfrost. HERE'S the description:

Ravenwhisker wasn't raised like this. She was raised to be a calm and collected she-cat, to probably have kits and to live out a good average FogClan warrior life.
But here she stands before a dead fox, speculating about leg wounds with (practically) a stranger, and she can't help but notice this is definitely not what her mother had planned for her.

It was an accident too. Ravenwhisker accidentally ran into some weirdo warrior, and now she's gone from quietly sharing tongues to deciding on the best way to escape a murder scene. Because, of course, when you run into a weirdo, you get wrapped up in their weirdo things.

Basically it's detective!cats and another Sherlock Holmes-esque cat because I'm a sucker for smart cats there's so much potential I think. He's veeeery different from Sparkfur though. Similar in a few aspects, but different in just about every other way. Ravenwhisker will be our relatable character that we connect with to bridge us to the warriors world. I might need a few days to finish planning on it before I can start working but for the most part I know what I'm doing. It probably won't be very long either unless I throw in a lot of side plots. OH YEAH it's set in the Spark AU about 16 years earlier, in FogClan. I know, I can't let that AU go but honestly it's the perfect place to carry out a story like this because the clans are so huge. Also I like the clan set ups.

NEXT OPTION

That one human warriors AU I wrote about in my art book. I have two, I have the Neko one called the New Era and then this one, Shadows Rising.

Set in a vast land big enough to support four clans of a human-like species, this story follows a young warrior named Wrenlight. She lives a comfortable life among family and friends, or, as comfortable as a life *can* get in a wild clan. That is, until, Freema comes. She's wild, beautiful, fun, and a complete mystery. Everyone thought it would be okay. Freema could train and become a warrior like them--

And then *they* came.

It would be two or maybe three books but only like 10 chapters or less per book probably. I haven't started planning like.,.... at all. I have no idea what the frick I'm going to do with it besides the main plot but I haven't even decided an ending for it soooo..... . . . . Yeah.

THERES ALSO
An original. It's called Polaris. It has a lot to do with the stars, a girl finding her way in life, and a guy who just wants to get home. It has a huge fantasy aspect, like it isn't some typical wattpad romance "girl meets boy quirky plot the end" thing. It actually isn't a

romance at all. I suck at romance. I've never even had a boyfriend, come on, how do you expect me to write about stuff I haven't experienced. Gay cats aren't the same as humans.

OKAY so those are the three things that I'm interested in working on next, opinions on what I should do and advice for it? Please don't take my ideas either, even if I don't end up using them >:-0 they aren't free for your use.

OH YEAH once again, thank you so much for reading and following along with crows, all of your votes and super kind comments mean so much to me!!!!!!! I love you guys all so much. Thanks again. I love you all. I'll see you soon. Goodbye my friends.

- Tea